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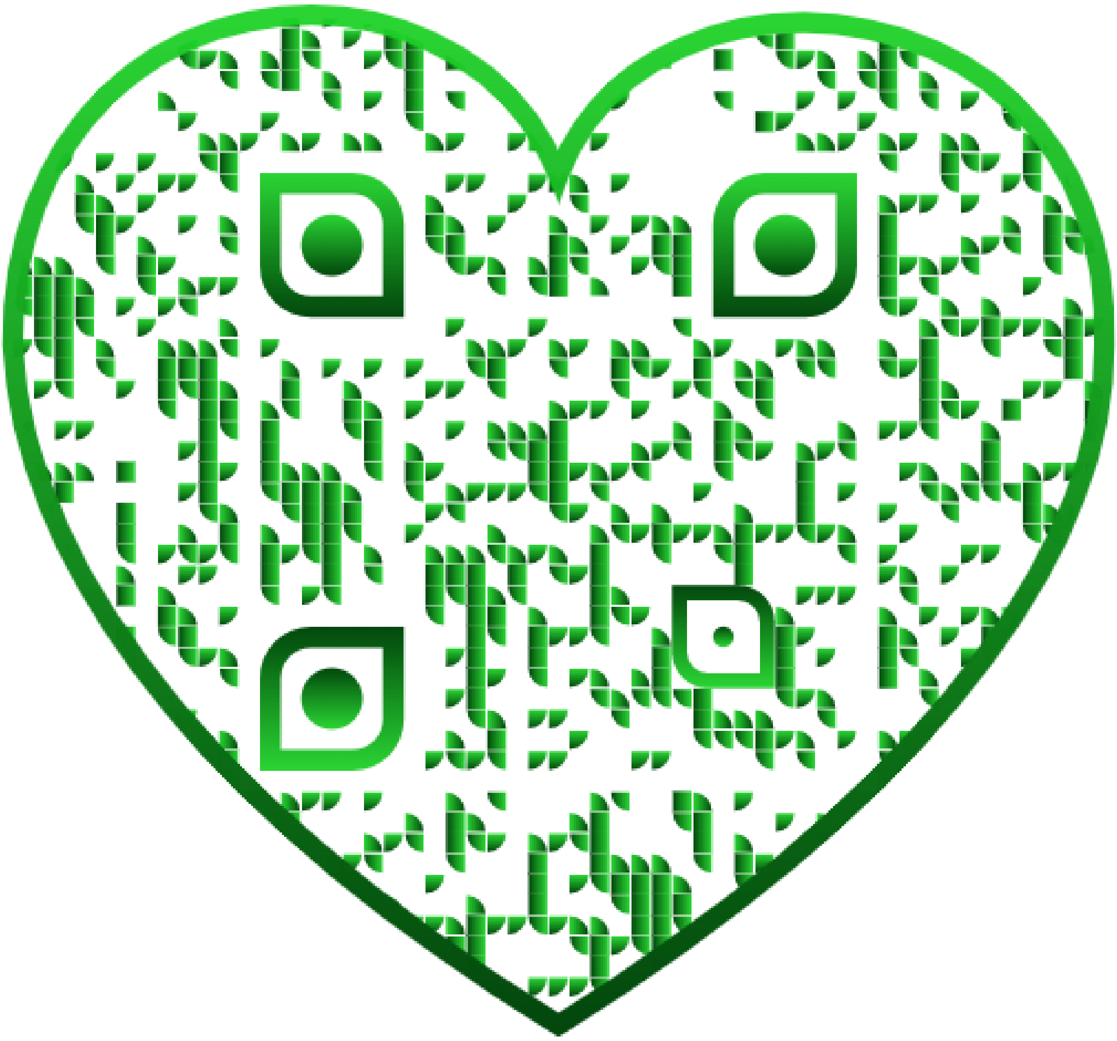

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# Adirondack Homes & Camps

VOLUME LVI, NO. 7 | 2025

## FEATURES

**34 Growing Up Brandreth**
Inside my family's 174-year-old legacy
BY GINNY BRANDRETH
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARRIE MARIE BURR

**44 Privy Cool**
Adirondack architects reimagine the outhouse

**48 Treasure Island**
The unexpected riches—and the family who saved them—at Saranac Lake's Robert Louis Stevenson Cottage
BY TIM ROWLAND
PHOTOGRAPHS BY YVONNE ALBINOWSKI

**52 The River Fixers**
How the Adirondack Freshwater Center and an army of native seedlings are healing the Ausable
BY PAUL GREENBERG
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMIE WEST MCGIVER

**58 Loft to Lodge**
Jonathan Sweet's modern take on Adirondack rustic furniture
BY JOE CONNELLY

**60 Craft Master**
Hand-building a dream camp on Rainbow Lake
BY STEVE AMSTUTZ
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIE WALMSLEY

**COVER:** ADK-MOD chair by Jonathan Sweet. Photograph courtesy of Studio Sweet

**ABOVE:** Camp Good Enough, Brandreth Park. Photograph by Carrie Marie Burr

**BELOW:** Ausable Freshwater Center seedlings. Photograph by Jamie West McGiver

## DEPARTMENTS

**07 EDITOR'S NOTE**
On the Shed
BY ANNIE STOLTIE

**10 ENVIRONMENT**
Bright Ideas
BY BILL MCKIBBEN

**14 SPECIAL PLACES**
Reading, Writing and Revival
BY HOWARD RILEY & RUTH CHASOLEN

**20 PRESERVATION**
Bearhurst
BY NIKI KOUROFSKY

**24 PLACES IN TIME**
The Kill Kare Chronicles
BY TOM DOW

**74 BARKEATER**
Baby Blue Line
BY SAWYER BAILEY

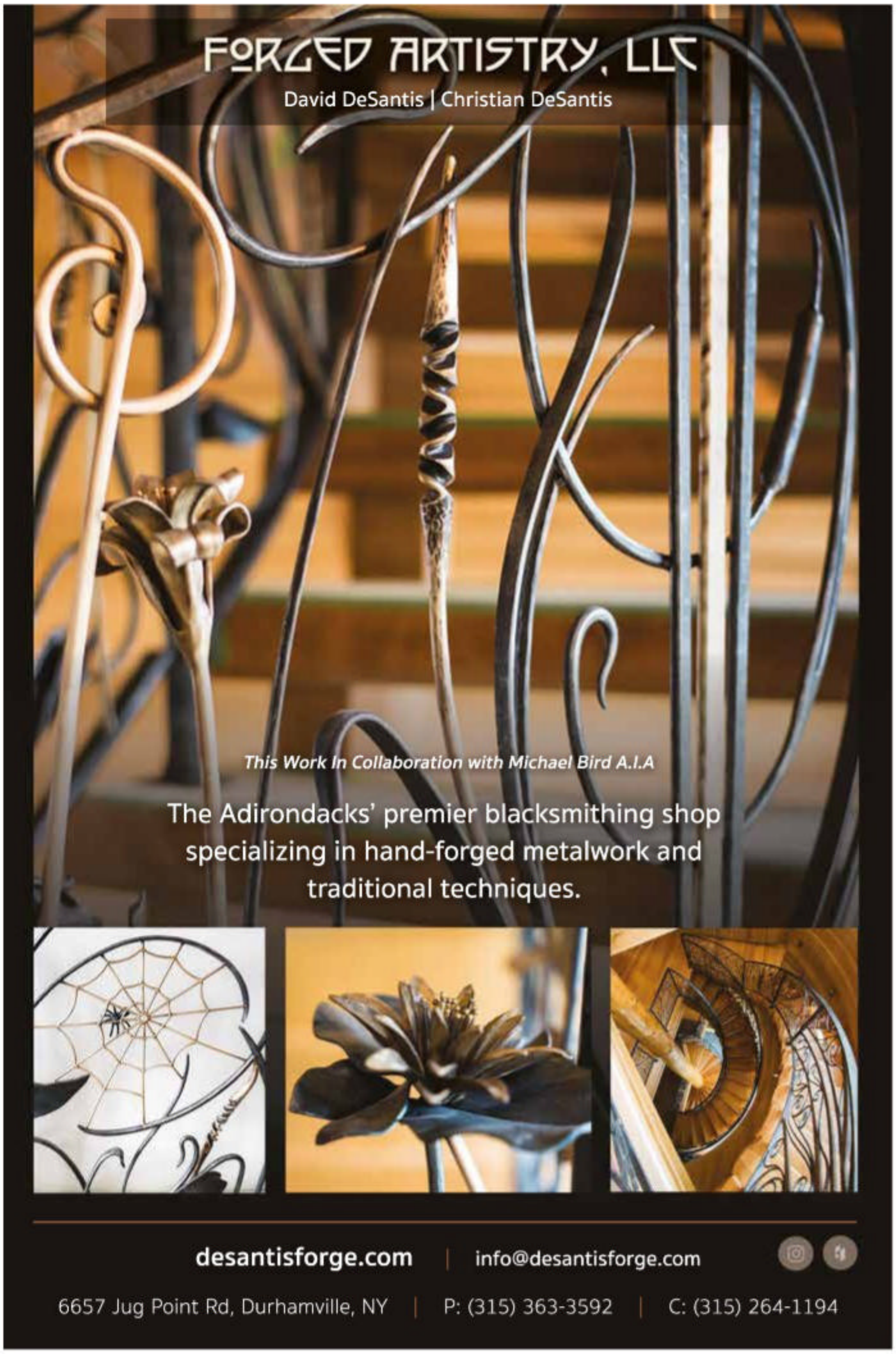
**80 DESIGN**
Local Talent
BY TONY HALL

**84 NORTH COUNTRY**
The Beaver House
BY DAVID GIBSON

**88 GROWING**
Mushrooms and More
BY NIKI KOUROFSKY

**92 BUILDING**
Lofty Spaces
BY DEREK "DEEK" DIEDRICKSEN

**96 BACK PAGE**
High Style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ANNIE STOLTIE AT AMIRAULT'S SHED PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMIE WEST MCGIVER

# On the Shed

Three hundred antlers. That's how many Jim "Jeemer" Amirault has collected during his 15 years of "shed" explorations throughout the Adirondack—and Maine—woods. And while white-tailed deer and moose antlers have long been a staple of North Country décor, displaying his finds—other than a selection hung on his backyard shed, in Upper Jay—has never been Amirault's goal. It's more about the challenge of finding the sheds. Amirault looks to the forest floor for the animals' headpieces after they fall off, post-rut. Although he's hiked the Adirondacks' 46 highest peaks multiple times, been up Cascade 27 times and Gothics around 15, "You get to where your erosion factor is too high," he says. "So being off in the woods, I can just wander and there's not so much to worry about it."

Antlers are made of bone. Their growth is triggered by hormones, their size determined by genetics and nutrition. (Moose antlers can reach a diameter of six feet and weigh about 40 pounds each.) Females see bucks' racks as sexy ornaments, but the guys' antlers are also tools to mark territory, and weapons to spar with other males to prove dominance. Once breeding season ends, the connection between antler and skull weakens and eventually breaks.

Amirault says each shed tells a story—he knows where specific animals roam, sometimes finding the same deer's antlers year after year. He also follows state regulations regarding where and when it's legal to collect on public land. "You never want to stress the deer," he says. The animals "are already exhausting themselves just to survive."

For every shed Amirault has picked up and brought home, he can tell you where and when, exactly, he found it. They've become "mementos of a hike I was on," he says, many of which he took with his brother Tom, who passed away earlier this year.

In and around his home are piles of these trophies, reminders of the beauty of the natural world and the importance of appreciating it. —*Annie Stoltie*

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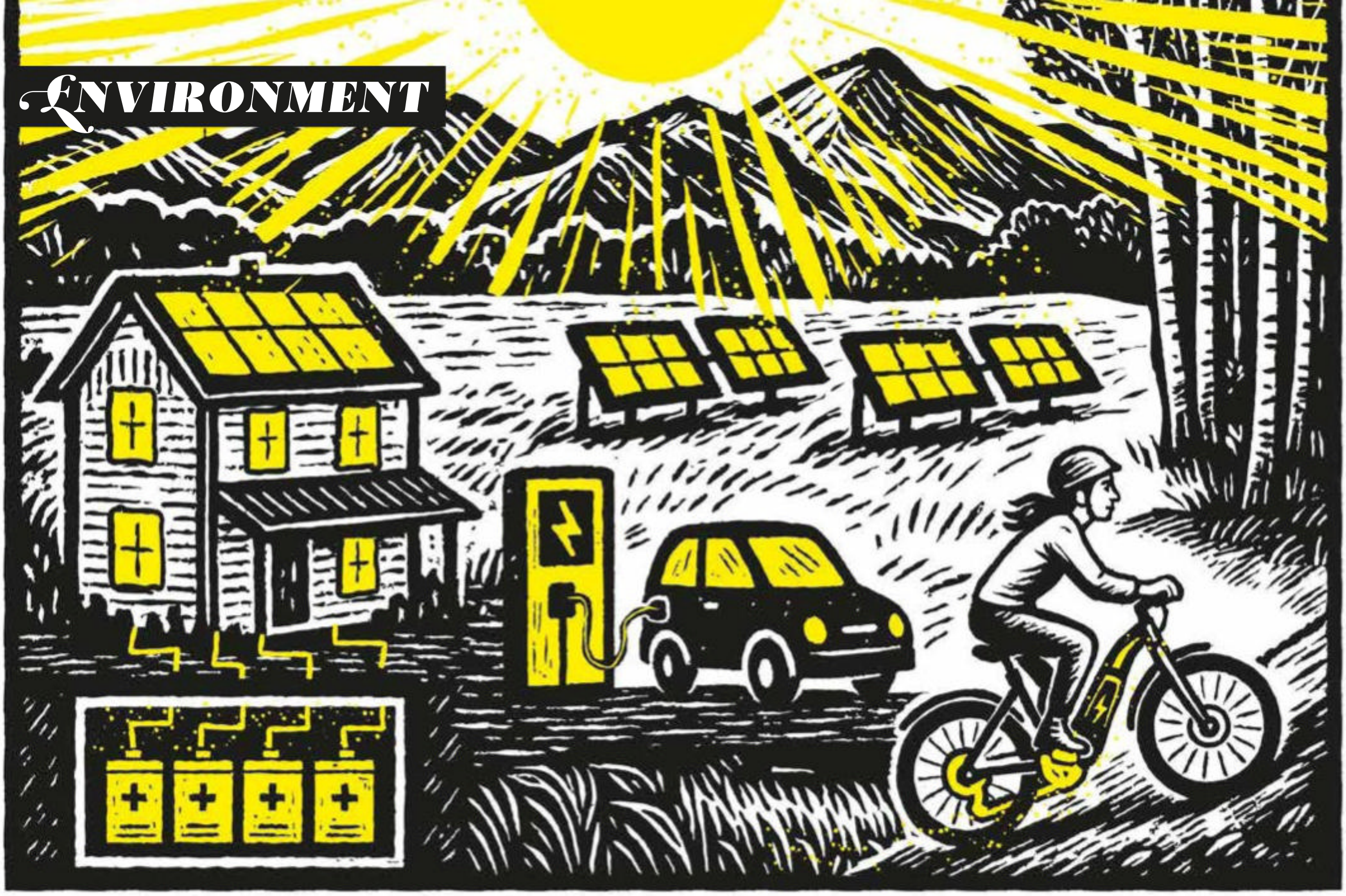

ILLUSTRATION BY GWEN JAMISON VOGEL

# Bright Ideas

## Here's how to protect the Adirondacks, starting at home

### BY BILL MCKIBBEN

**What's a life without pouring carbon into the air worth? "To me," writes the author, "almost everything. Because as much as I love my house in the Adirondacks, I love the Adirondacks a good deal more."**

We have, for a very long time, thought about a roof one way: as a device to keep out the rain. That's important, and ever more so as climate change increases the frequency and intensity of downpours.

But something else falls on our roofs every day too, a staggering quantity of energy, streaming down from the sun. And now we have the technology to make full use of it: to harvest that windfall, to store it in batteries, and in the process to make your home your increasingly self-sufficient castle.

I can talk a little about solar power at these latitudes because we've relied on it for most of our power for a quarter century. My wife and I put up our first panels back when they were expensive—but since I've spent my life writing about climate change, I figured that we were well-placed to be pioneers. Since then the price has fallen steadily, and the panels have gotten ever more efficient—we have four generations on our roof and in our meadow, and the new ones are far better than the originals. Next year's will be better still, but that's no reason to wait.

Especially since, if you manage to get the work done this fall, you can still have the federal government help with the cost. The Trump administration—heavily funded and staffed by the fossil fuel industry—is doing all that it can to kill off renewable energy. They've banned new sun and wind projects on federal land, and they've killed off what were supposed to be a decade's worth of incentives in the Biden-era Inflation Reduction Act. But that decision doesn't take effect until New Year's Eve—act now, and you can get a 30-percent federal tax credit.

You can also get a fair amount of peace of mind. One feature of North Country living, obviously, is that the power goes out. That's why the sound of an ice storm is the sound of diesel generators firing up. But those produce noise and stench (and enough carbon monoxide to kill people every year); increasingly affordable batteries in the basement mean that at our house, when the power goes down, an uninterrupted flow of electrons keeps computers, routers and refrigerators humming.

The electricity we're generating is far more useful than it was 25 years ago as well, because engineers have figured out how to electrify the holy trinity of household appliances. Instead of a furnace we roll with electric heat pumps, far more efficient—and in the summer they reverse their purpose, becoming air conditioners. (Something we never used to need in these mountains, but that was then.) Instead of an old-fashioned internal combustion engine, we drive an EV: fast, quiet, elegant in a way none of our cars have been before. (A Kia Niro, if you're wondering.) And we have e-bikes too, which get us the miles to the nearest store in all but the toughest weather—an e-bike is a bike that comes without hills, which is to say it was designed for the Adirondacks. And to round it off, we replaced the gas stovetop in the kitchen with an induction cooktop—we cook faster than we ever have before, and without a little campfire in the middle of the home. Does this matter? Well, we have a new grandson, and studies show that asthma rates are 50-percent higher in homes with gas-fired cooking.

And of course if you're thinking about grandkids—well, we're living without pouring carbon into the air, which means that our daily lives don't do much damage to the climate. What's that worth? To me, almost everything.

Because as much as I love my house in the Adirondacks, I love the Adirondacks a good deal more. And these mountains and forests are under hideous pressure from the rising temperature. Winter—that magic stretch when friction gives up its grip on the Earth and we can glide across its surface—is shorter and shorter; the birch and beech and maple that give us autumn magic live here because the temperature is right.

I want an Adirondacks that resembles the one we've known in the past. That means I need a house that takes part in the future.

**Bill McKibben is the author of more than 20 books; his latest is *Here Comes the Sun: A Last Chance for the Climate and a Fresh Chance for Civilization.***

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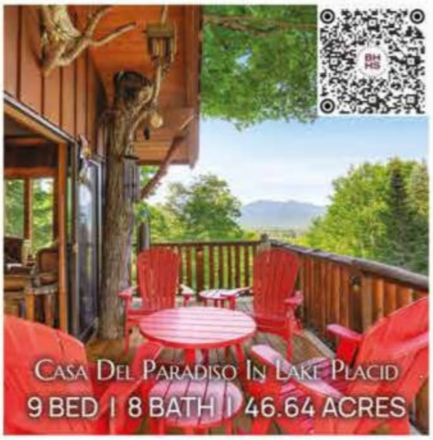
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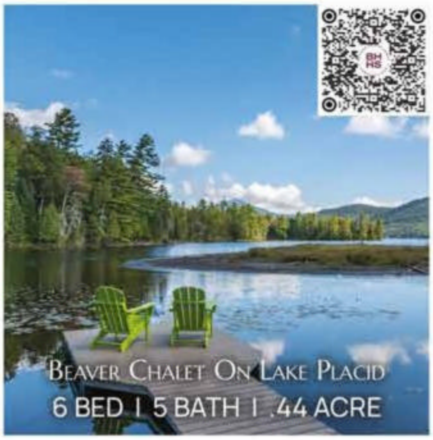
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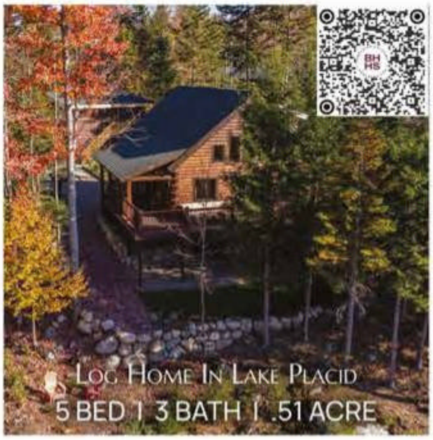
Log Home In Lake Placid
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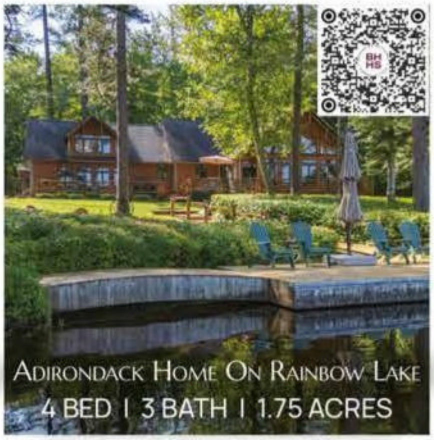
Adirondack Home On Rainbow Lake
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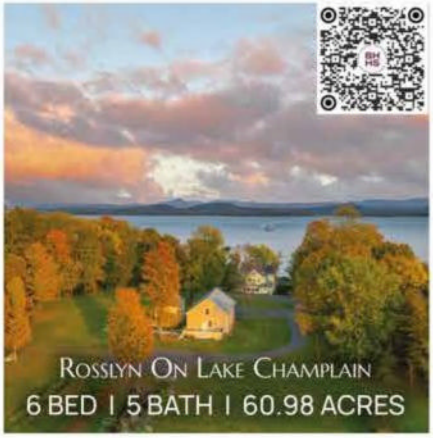
Rosslyn On Lake Champlain
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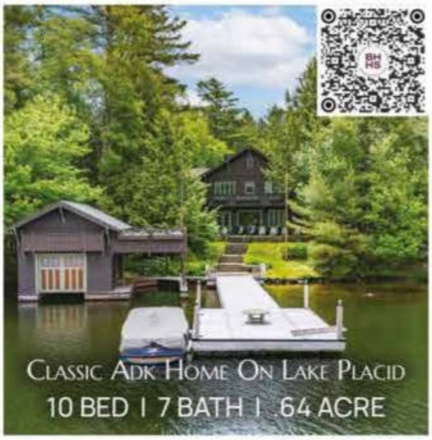
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Camp Wawbeek On Upper Saranac
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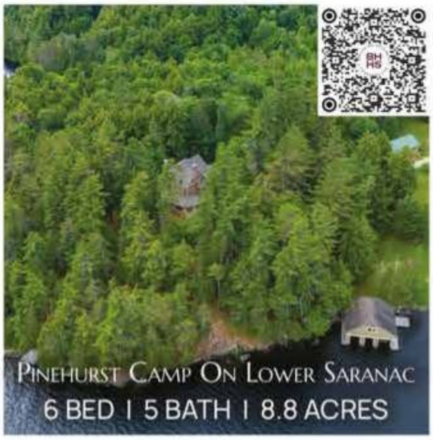
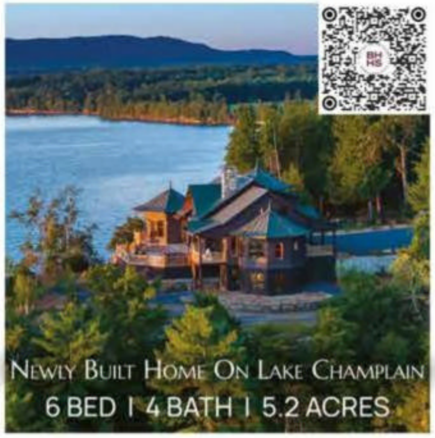
Camp Stillwaters On Oseetah Lake
4 BED | 4 BATH | .72 ACRE


Pinehurst Camp On Lower Saranac
6 BED | 5 BATH | 8.8 ACRES


Newly Built Home On Lake Champlain
6 BED | 4 BATH | 5.2 ACRES

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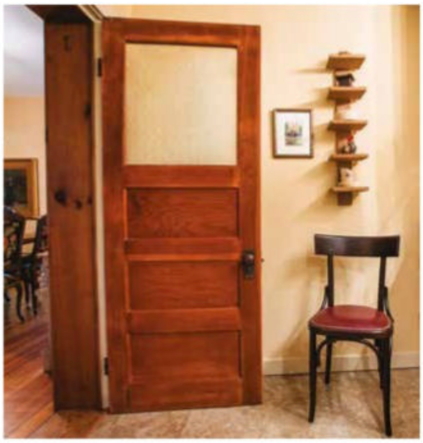

# Reading, Writing and Revival

## Bringing a Harrietstown schoolhouse back to life

BY HOWARD RILEY & RUTH CHASOLEN

**In 1937 Howard Riley was a second-grader in the classroom he now calls home.**

When I (Howard) sat down at my office desk to write this, I realized that I sat down at my second-grade school desk in this same spot 88 years ago. My home today, where I live with my wife, Ruth, was the Harrietstown schoolhouse in 1937. My family lived just up the road "a piece," which in country parlance could mean a mile or a hundred yards.

Today in what was the schoolhouse, the beautiful, original Douglas fir floor looks like it might have been installed last week, not early in the last century. The building has 10-foot ceilings and six-foot-high windows, created to let in lots of light. The original ceilings were sheets of patterned tin because heat rises and warms the tin, which then warms the building. We currently have one remaining room with the original tin ceiling. The school at that time was heated by a large kerosene stove near the back wall.

Almost every inch of the schoolhouse has been remodeled except for the old bathroom door with a panel of hammered glass.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA

### How I Got Here the First Time

I started first grade in Gabriels, where Gertrude (Otis) Downs was my teacher; there were no kindergartens in the 1930s. There were maybe 15 students in that first-grade class.

In the ’30s, if one moved a mile or more—which my family did—you had to attend a different school. So that is how I ended up in this schoolhouse in 1937, so close to the one in Gabriels.

There were about 15 students in my new school, but they were spread over eight grades. The teacher, Ms. Weinstock, would give me a second-grade lesson, then go to someone in another grade and do the same.

I have fond recollections of my days here. I walked by myself the half-mile or so to the school from our home on the same road. There were wide steps at the entrance and a large yard to play in. It was a friendly and comfortable place. I can still hear the sounds and envision the kids at their desks, seated in grade order. Although I spent only one year here, my experience had a positive impact on me.

At first I was a little shy because I did not know any of the kids. On the first day, Ms. Weinstock greeted and welcomed me warmly with a kiss on the cheek. When I arrived home that day, my mother asked me what had happened to my face. Little did I realize I had worn an imprint of my teacher’s red lipstick throughout the day.

### Other Homes and Schools

My five siblings and I were born at the Sisters Farm, in Gabriels, where our dad was the manager. He left that job and leased Split Rock Farm, which was a short distance from Gabriels, across the bridge from where the Shamrock Bar & Grill is today.

About a year later, lightning struck the main barn. Dad ran out and cut loose the two draft horses tied in their stalls. The cows and two other horses were out in the pasture, but the new equipment in the machine shed was destroyed. Then the hay barn caught fire and burned to the ground. Saranac Lake firemen managed to save the

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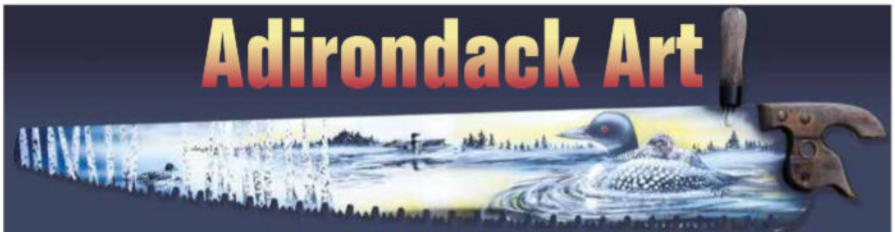

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house even though the back porch and kitchen had caught fire.

We had about 15 milk cows, which had to be milked morning and night. Frank Noyes had a farm just up the road "a piece" with a big empty house and cow barn. After the fire, with neighbors pitching in, our cows were herded up the road into the cow barn. We moved into the big, former tourist home that was part of the farm. Our grandfather then joined us, and even with a family of nine we used only part of the house.

There was a small room next to the kitchen with a desk and chair, and a wall-mounted telephone. The phone mouthpiece stuck out from the big wooden phone box with a crank on the side to ring the desired number. One day during a thunder and lightning storm, a ball of fire, as round as a golf ball, came through the mouthpiece, rolled around the room and disappeared. I yelled to my mother in the kitchen and she witnessed it briefly before it vanished.

A short time later, my father bought a 200-acre farm on Norman Ridge, in Vermontville, from the Federal Land Bank. Even though there was a school in Vermontville, we attended the Porter School on the Fletcher Farm Road, now the remodeled home of photographer Mark Kurtz.

That school had eight grades with one teacher, Mae Arnold. Ms. Arnold's brother, Ralph, owned and drove the school bus. The school buses at that time were all privately owned; routes and buses were contracted out from the school board in each district.

Our farm on Norman Ridge was lost during the Depression. Dad then took a job managing the Oseetah Dairy, in Ray Brook. So I started my fourth school at St. Bernard's, in Saranac Lake, arriving in the sixth grade with about 30 other kids in that class. The teacher was Sister Mary Martin. This new school, with that many kids in one class, was a challenge for this farm boy who had never been to a movie or a restaurant.

Well, Ms. Mae Arnold must have done a pretty good job with me. In the Catholic school the first row of desks in the classroom was known as the "honor

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row." It had about seven seats and I made the last seat in the row by the end of that school year.

I never would have imagined that a journey from second grade at the Harrietstown School would lead me back to life here in this very place.

### How We Got Back Here

Howard told me (Ruth) he had this surreal feeling—strange, dreamlike and bizarre—as he walked into his old schoolhouse after so many decades.

With residences in both New Jersey and Saranac Lake, Howard and I commuted back and forth every weekend for many years. I was compelled to finally move here for a life with Howard in a place of beauty and deep connection.

We routinely drove by a spectacular mountain view, halting in its glorious Adirondack presence. The former one-room schoolhouse, then a small home, sat facing this scene. One day there was a "for sale" sign. Our decision to own this piece of Howard's history took only moments.

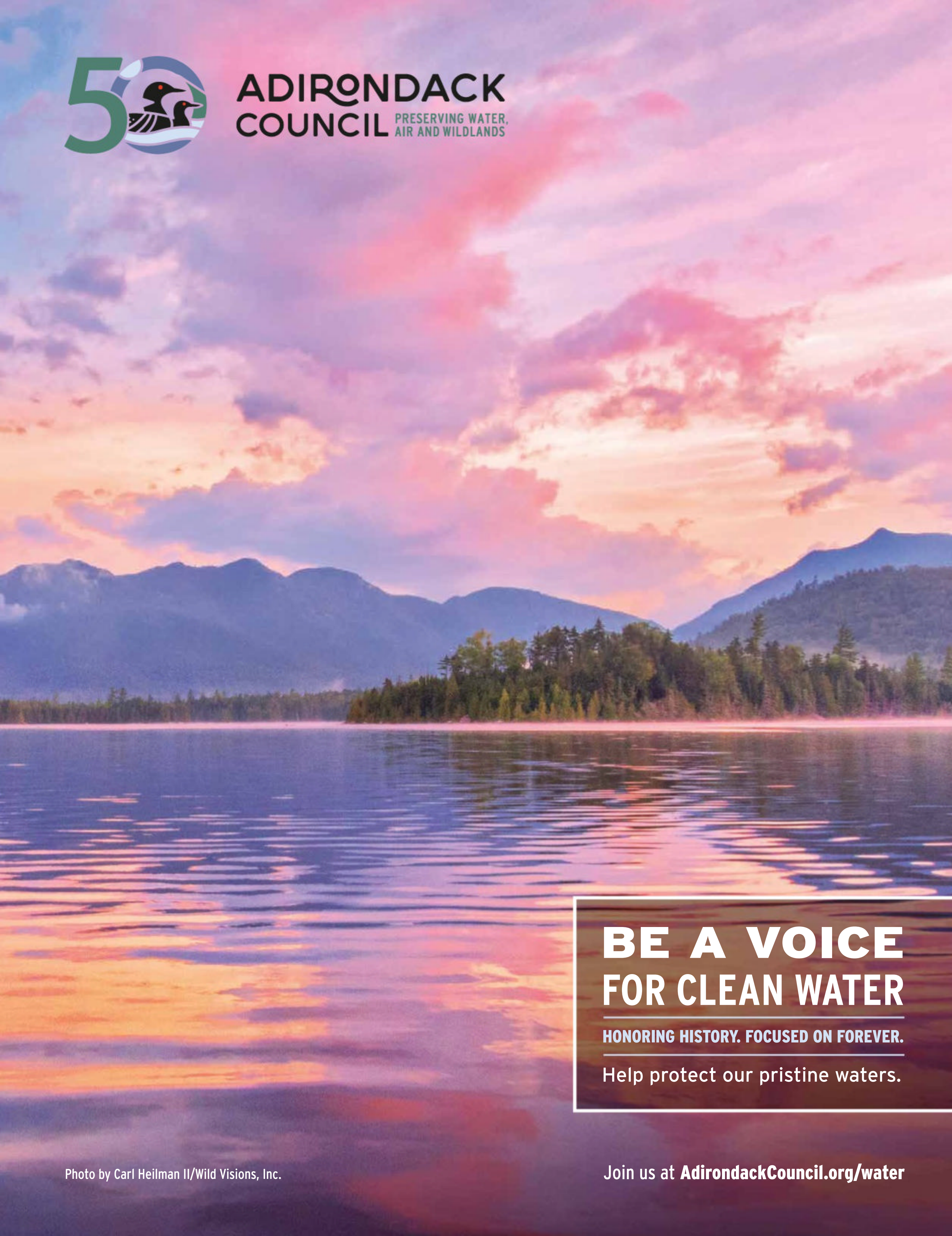
Although steeped in charm and nostalgia, the 900-square-foot home had two small bedrooms and one bath. It called for further extension. Our vision of capturing the majestic view from every vantage point while allowing natural light to pour in was the key element in our planning.

A seamless addition and upgrades were added in a warm, cream-color palette that served as a canvas for country French decor and views of the outdoors.

The pictorial fields and mountains inspired my passion for developing perennial gardens and stone pathways, integrating our home into the Adirondack landscape.

The fact that Howard spent his childhood days here is a constant reminder of how this cherished life connects us to past and present.

**Howard Riley—mayor of Saranac Lake from 1964 to 1967—is a former editor of the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise* and *Lake Placid News*, a 1980 Olympics senior staff member and an inductee in the Lake Placid Hall of Fame.**



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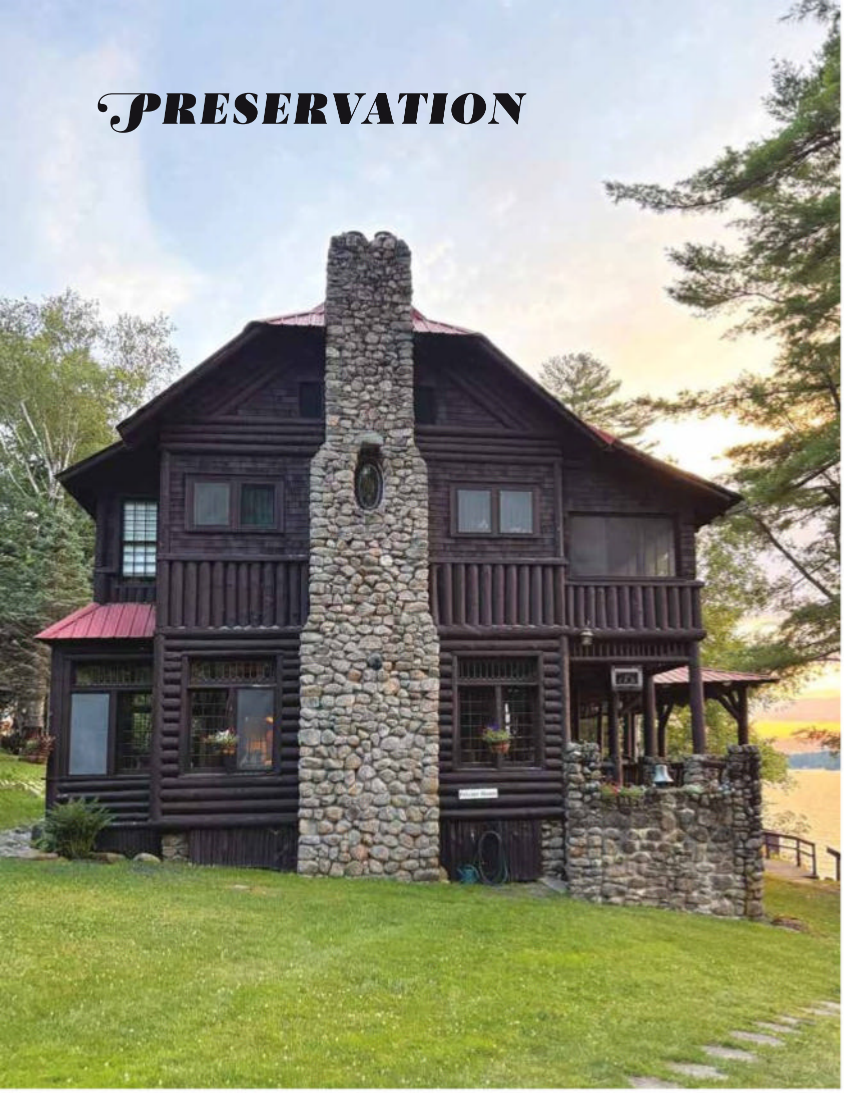

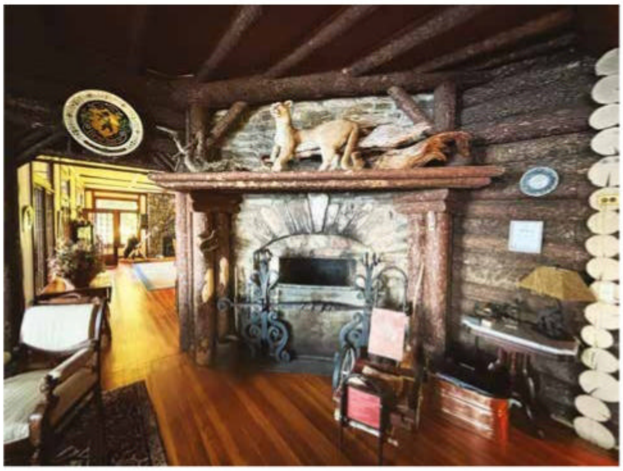

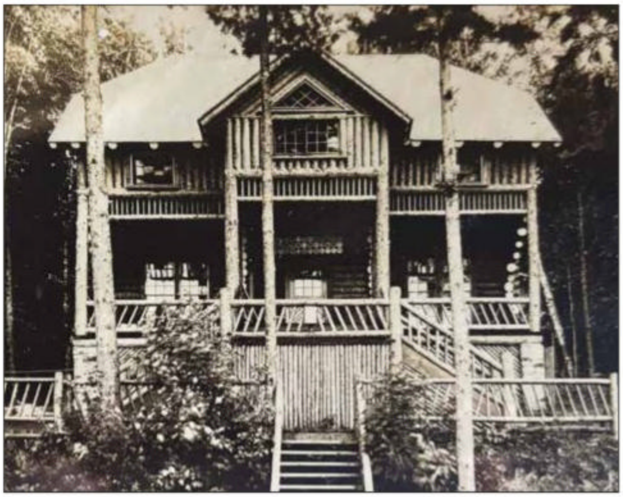

1905 PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE ARMSTRONG FAMILY. MODERN PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

# Bearhurst

## The rebirth of a spectacles magnate's Speculator Great Camp

### BY NIKI KOUROFSKY

**Originally built as an upscale hunting camp in 1894, Bearhurst grew in grandeur through the early 1900s, before being abandoned for more than a decade.**

After immigrating to New York City in the 1870s, Emil Bruno Meyrowitz founded what would become one of the world's largest retailers of optical glass. (Charles Lindbergh sported Meyrowitz goggles on his record-breaking transatlantic flight.) He was also pretty good at spotting a can't-miss deal. In 1891 Meyrowitz and two partners paid $100 for 100 acres of prime Adirondack property, including a gorgeous stretch of Lake Pleasant shoreline; by 1894, they'd built a lakeside hunting retreat they named Bearhurst. Meyowitz bought his partners out the following year.

At first Bearhurst was a modest affair, at least by Great Camp standards: two-and-a-half stories of vertical- and horizontal-log construction, with a rustic double-staircase leading to a deep porch. The great room—a showcase of unpeeled timber—featured a chunky stone fireplace at its heart and a peeled log-and-branch staircase leading to the sleeping quarters. Though the space was designed for sportsmen, it wasn't without creature comforts. There was central heating, thanks to a wood-fired furnace beneath the great room, and a rich collection of leaded windows, befitting Meyrowitz's kingly position in the glass world. The great room's curlicue andirons and dragon-themed chandeliers had been hammered out by John Buyce, a well-known Speculator blacksmith whose shop advertised "odd and unusual things that you can't get done at the other place."

Over the years, the camp grew in grandeur. In the early 1900s Meyrowitz added two half-log-sided expansions, with new spaces for dining, a library, and more bedrooms upstairs. The original wooden entranceway was replaced by a showstopping stone double-staircase, and a kitchen and icehouse were connected to the main building by a covered walkway. The pump house—which supplied the household with lake water—doubled as a “coke house,” producing gas for the estate’s lighting. Guests arrived by a multi-day relay of rail service from New York City to Fonda, stagecoach to Speculator and steam launch across Lake Pleasant.

But when Emil passed away, in 1937, Bearhurst went into hibernation. The property was subdivided, and the lakeside complex—main lodge, cook and servants’ house, icehouse, woodshed, pump house, boathouse and 10 acres—went on the market for $29,500. In the depths of the Depression, there were no takers.

So the Great Camp sat for more than a decade, overrun by wildlife and ransacked by opportunists, who stripped it of almost everything that wasn’t nailed down. (Old John Buyce’s massive andirons managed to outlast the pillaging, thanks to their unyielding weight.) Still, the sturdy bones of Bearhurst held up well, and much of its remarkable window collection survived intact.

By the early 1950s the place was shaggy with weeds and known around town as “the haunted hotel.” But it had retained enough charm to turn the head of teenager Helen Funfschilling, who caught sight of Bearhurst while boating on Lake Pleasant with her sister and a friend during a family vacation. She was so taken with the forgotten estate that she begged her parents, William and Frieda, to swing by and take a look themselves. Soon the whole family was smitten, and the Funfschillings—Swiss immigrants who owned a successful New York City pastry shop—paid $17,500 to buy a lifelong project in the wilderness.

Every warm-weather weekend for years, the family closed their bakery on Saturday evening to drive to Speculator, where they’d spend Sunday slowly rehabbing their new getaway before driving back to the city that night. Once the main lodge was presentable, they rented rooms to acquaintances and started converting the outbuildings into vacation cabins.

They soon had help. Richard Arm-

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strong, a young lifeguard and sailing instructor on Lake Pleasant, staged a boating mishap in front of Bearhurst just to get Helen Funfschilling's attention. It worked—he and Helen became an item, and married in 1957—but Richard got more than he bargained for: "[William] put me to work," Richard says. "He was a smart guy."

In the early years, Richard says the family "had a project every single day in summer"—a kitchen added to the main lodge, all new plumbing and electric, sprawling wood floors refinished. They saved as many of the original building materials as they could, replacing cracked window panes as needed, preserving antique fixtures, repurposing gas lines as electrical conduit.

The main lodge is a dedicated family space now, but Bearhurst's outbuildings have been transformed into four summer cottages and a year-rounder (the old icehouse, which has been winterized). Helen and Richard took the reins of the operation in 1986 and continued the tradition of never-ending upkeep and improvement. In 2010, Adirondack Architectural Heritage recognized the Armstrongs with a longterm stewardship award.

Their son, Rich, and daughter-in-law, Diana, now own the complex, though Helen and Richard still summer in the main lodge, visiting with their growing brood of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Rich, who grew up working on the place alongside his father and grandfather, is keeping the hammers hammering—he recently teamed up with Diana and their daughter and son-in-law to renovate the family's latest rental, a year-round cabin they call The Den, which once belonged to Helen's sister.

Richard points out that the family has loved and protected this slice of Adirondack history for three-quarters of a century. The hope is to keep it going for another generation of caretakers.

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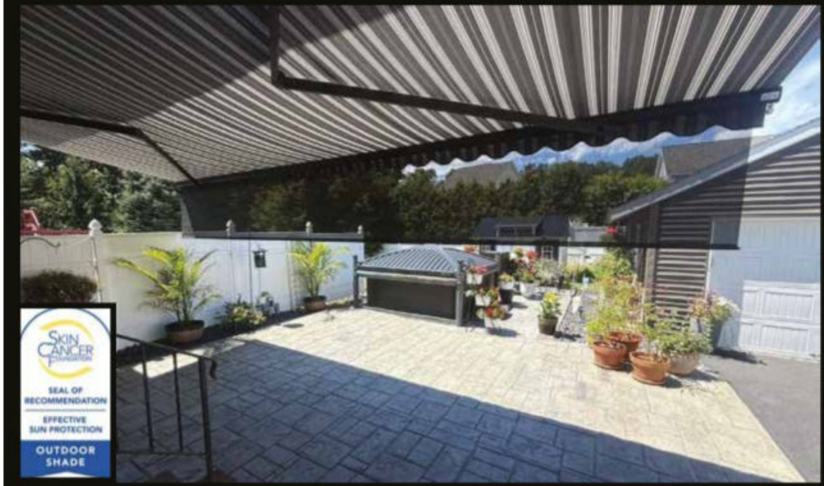

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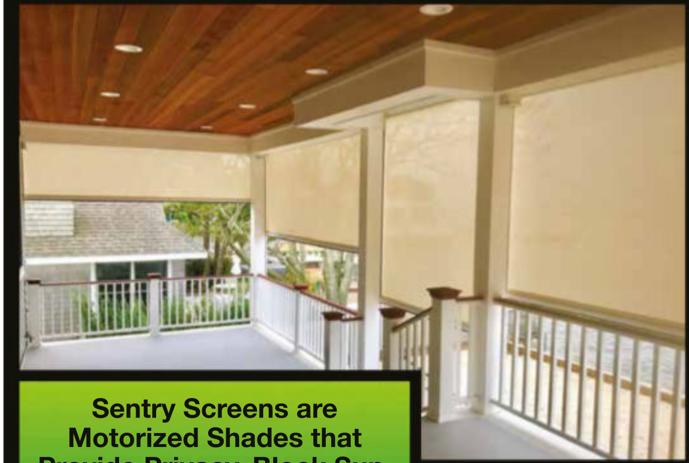

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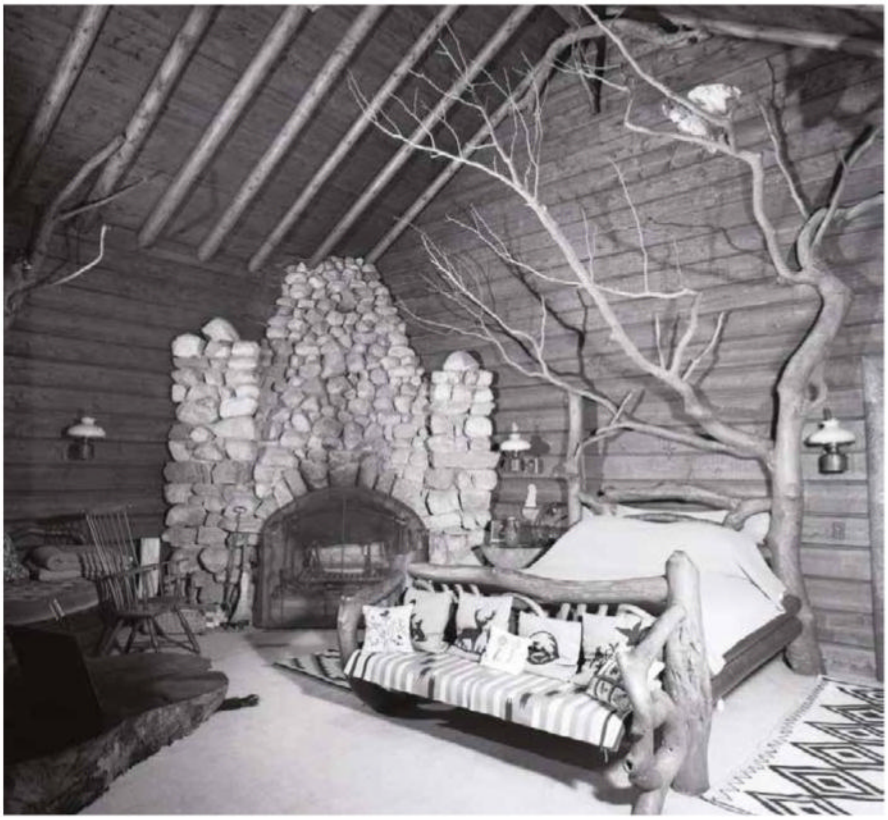


One of the bellhops' duties was to sneak into Mrs. Garvan's bedroom at dawn and light the fire without waking her.

PHOTOGRAPH FROM ADIRONDACK EXPERIENCE

# The Kill Kare Chronicles

## My two summers as a Great Camp servant

BY TOM DOW

Tell people you had a summer job at an Adirondack camp, and most assume you ran herd on a bunkhouse full of homesick, sunburned kids. My summer job wasn't like that. It was altogether different, because Kamp Kill Kare was an altogether different kind of camp.

Kill Kare was—and still is—a Great Camp, a large and rustic lakeside estate. It rates its own chapter in Craig Gilborn's *Adirondack Camps* and is featured in Harvey Kaiser's *Great Camps of the Adirondacks*. Adjacent compounds were owned by J. P. Morgan and Alfred G. Vanderbilt. Call it an upscale neighborhood.

Kill Kare as I knew it had been completed around 1917. In 1969, my first season there, it was the summer retreat of the very wealthy and by then quite elderly Mabel Brady Garvan, along with her family. Trying to explain Kill Kare I find myself describing a place that was really more of a community than a home, more monument than mountain getaway. In many ways it was a living museum. My two summers there were a passage through a time warp hidden far back in the woods, behind a locked gate, miles and decades away from the tumultuous realities of the late '60s.

I'll always wonder what made the nice lady at the state employment office in Old Forge decide I was right for the job—and if she did me a great favor or stuck me with the weird position she couldn't fill on a bet. I'd just finished my freshman year at Syracuse University and needed summer work. After a few questions she said she might have something. She made a call, then gave me directions to a mysterious sounding place somewhere south of Raquette Lake. I was to follow a dirt road into the woods for several miles. There would be no signs. A man would meet me at the unmarked gate at the end of the road. He'd have all the details. She did say the job title was bellhop.

At the gate—a thick peeled log between stout posts, secured with a chain and padlock—I was greeted by Mr. Wires, Kill Kare's no-nonsense superintendent. He looked me over and had me follow him through the entrance. I tailed his green Jeep Wagoneer for another few miles through the trees. Suddenly the forest opened to reveal a medieval-looking two-story stone tower. The road passed through it beneath a tall arch. The rough-cut stones were refrigerator-size blocks, the tower only one corner of a U-shaped complex of stone buildings. These impressive structures, it turned out, were merely Kill Kare's barns.

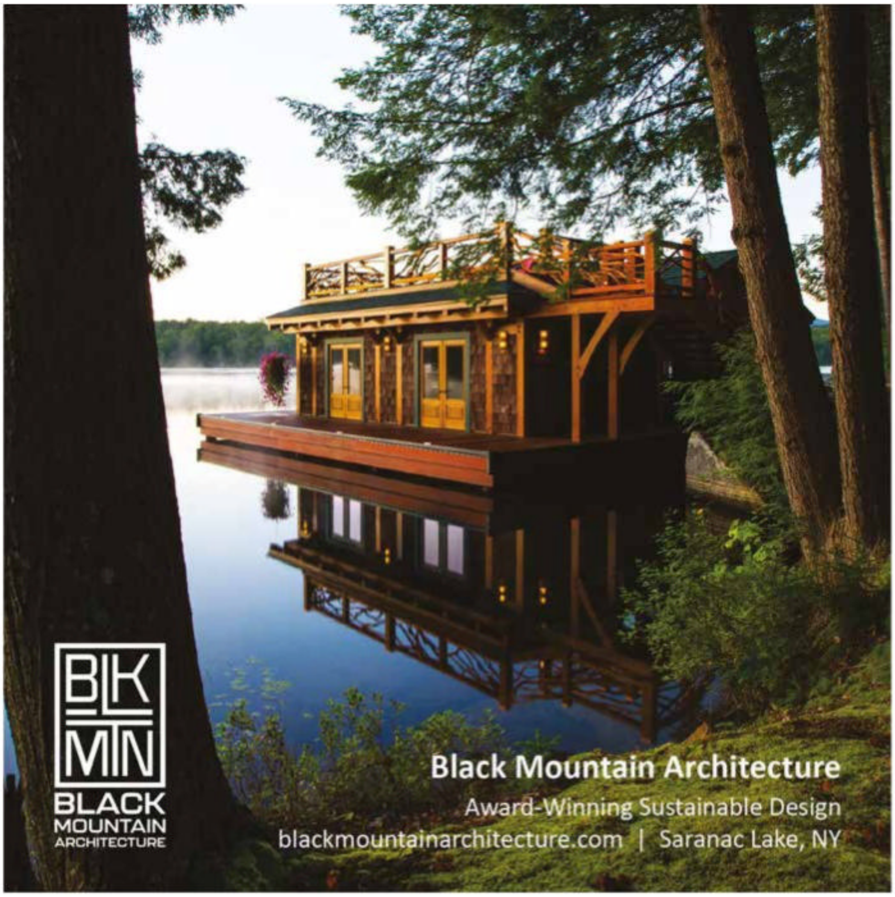
I had my job interview as we toured the camp. Beyond the barns lay what was known as the men's camp, a long, two-story log building with a deep porch. Beyond that were a couple of big cabins. None of this was the main camp, but only the service wing. Mr. Wires drove us a mile or so down a hill and along the lake to what he called the main house. It wasn't a house at all: It was a series of imposing one- and two-story log buildings strung together with overhangs and porches. They followed the crest of a low tree-covered hill and spilled out over the edge of the lake at the boathouse. There were several more outbuildings, plus a cabin standing alone on an island out in the lake. I later learned I was seeing only part of the camp and only one of the lakes.

Kill Kare, in fact, included twenty-plus buildings, from rustically grand to simply functional, and a good thousand acres of unspoiled Adirondack woodland. The Garvans had purchased the original camp from Alfred G. Vanderbilt in 1915; he had acquired it from Timothy Woodruff, a former lieutenant governor of New York. Francis P. Garvan was a respected New York City attorney, president of the Chemical Foundation—set up in 1917 to manage German chemical patents during World War I—and an important patron of American decorative arts who passed away in 1937. He and his wife, Mabel Brady Garvan, had seven children and also owned homes in Manhattan, Old Westbury and Millbrook, New York. After Kill Kare was damaged by fire in 1915, they commissioned famed architect John Russell Pope to rebuild and expand the camp on a grand scale.

Mr. Wires described a job that would start with outdoor work for five-and-a-half days a week and then become a seven-day-per-week indoor job—as a bellhop—once Mrs. Garvan arrived around the first of July. The bellhop title had little relation to the hotel position of the same name: it referred to the antique bell board in the help's dining room.

When a button was pressed anywhere in the main complex, a bell rang and a numbered panel on the bell board dropped, indicating where in the house the button had been pushed. A bellhop—there would be three of us—then ran to that location to see what was wanted. This was in lieu of modern technology, say, a telephone or an intercom. It was also my first clue that Kill Kare existed well outside the late 20th century.

Mr. Wires—and importantly, Mrs. Wires—deemed me acceptable, and I got the job. At first we student bellhops shared a room on the second floor of the men's camp. This looked and operated like a logging camp, at least as I imagined one. The men on the grounds crew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had small single rooms on the first floor, and we all shared a barracks-style bathroom and a sitting room. Awakened by a loud electric bell in the morning, we trooped to the dining room. We gathered there three times a day at a long table for a family-style breakfast, a huge lunch (called dinner) and a lighter supper. Entrance to the dining room was forbidden except at mealtimes. That first summer the kitchen was staffed by two elderly ladies—a cook and her helper, who also acted as housekeeper.

For 1960s college boys, exposure to the characters on the men's crew was an education. They seemed rustic in the extreme; true woodsmen, they used homemade bug dope that looked and smelled toxic.

The bellhops started working on the grounds with the crew, and also with Mrs. Wires in the main house. The crew had trucked large metal-lined wooden crates from storage in the barns. Carefully packed inside each were the items that couldn't be left in the unheated buildings during the winter. Prior to unpacking, Mrs. Wires set up a slide projector and screen in each room. Her slide show covered every angle of the room and the location of each item. We unpacked the boxes, placing the objects in the exact spots shown in the photos. (If we doubted this precision was necessary, the issue was settled when Mrs. Garvan called us in to move two nearly identical chairs that had somehow been switched.) The goal of this attention to detail was to create the illusion that nothing had changed since the previous summer.

Before Mrs. Garvan's arrival we bellhops moved into the servants' quarters of the main house, a two-story wing behind the kitchen building with individual rooms on the ground floor and a dormitory on the second. Included were a help's dining room and a staff lounge that served as the bellhop office. In this setting we met a new and very different type of Kill Kare staff—real professional domestic servants.

In those years, Mrs. Garvan gave most of her regular household the summers off. Kill Kare was staffed by ser-

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vants hired for the season in New York City, including a butler, a parlormaid, a chef and so on. Mrs. Garvan's primary chauffeur, a second chauffeur, her personal maid, a lifeguard for the boathouse dock, a babysitter to live in the children's cabin (children were housed in their own little cottage some distance from the main house), chambermaids, waitresses and a night watchman were all part of the retinue. I'm sure I've left out more than a few positions, and my list doesn't include Kill Kare's year-round staff—the superintendent and his wife, and resident electrician Riley Parsons and his wife.

The New York professionals were the most exotic of all. The butler was English and everything that implies. Starchy and cynical, he seemed unpleasantly surprised to find himself and his tuxedo exiled to the deep woods. The chefs came and went. I remember best a volatile young Italian who arrived with his wife and two small children. We watched, fascinated, as he made spun-sugar dessert decorations by flinging hot caramelized liquid over a broom handle, sculpting it like molten glass. Our meals were prepared by the help's cook and didn't include such artistry.

Our bellhop duties began with Mrs. Garvan's arrival. Some of these chores were strange. A well-known photo of Kill Kare shows her large bedroom with a great soaring tree bed, a stuffed owl perched high in the branches. In the corner is a massive stone fireplace protected by a heavy metal screen. An assignment bellhops rotated daily was rising at dawn, sneaking quietly into that room and, while not awakening the slumbering lady, lifting away the screen and lighting the fire. On the way out we did the same in her adjoining bathroom. We marveled that Mrs. Garvan was comfortable with this arrangement—strangers prowling around her bedroom while she slept. We felt like stalkers.

We worked shifts so that two of us were always on duty from early morning until night. One of us had to remain by the telephone at all times, and the only ringing phone in the main house was in our office. We then ran to look for

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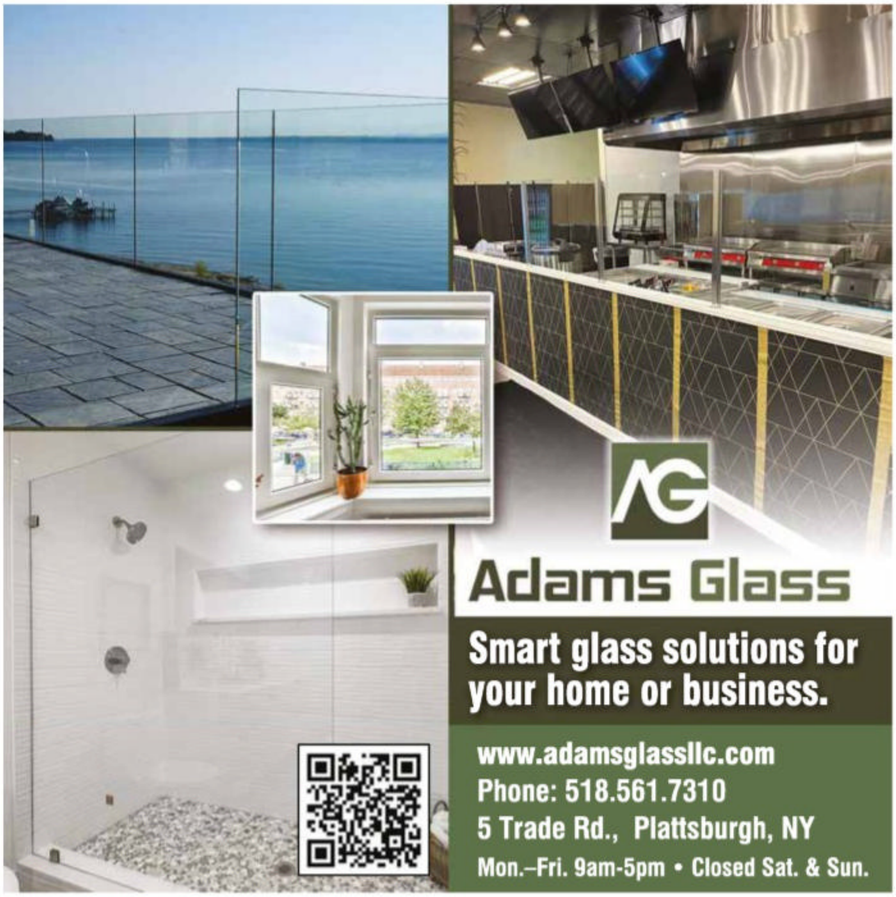

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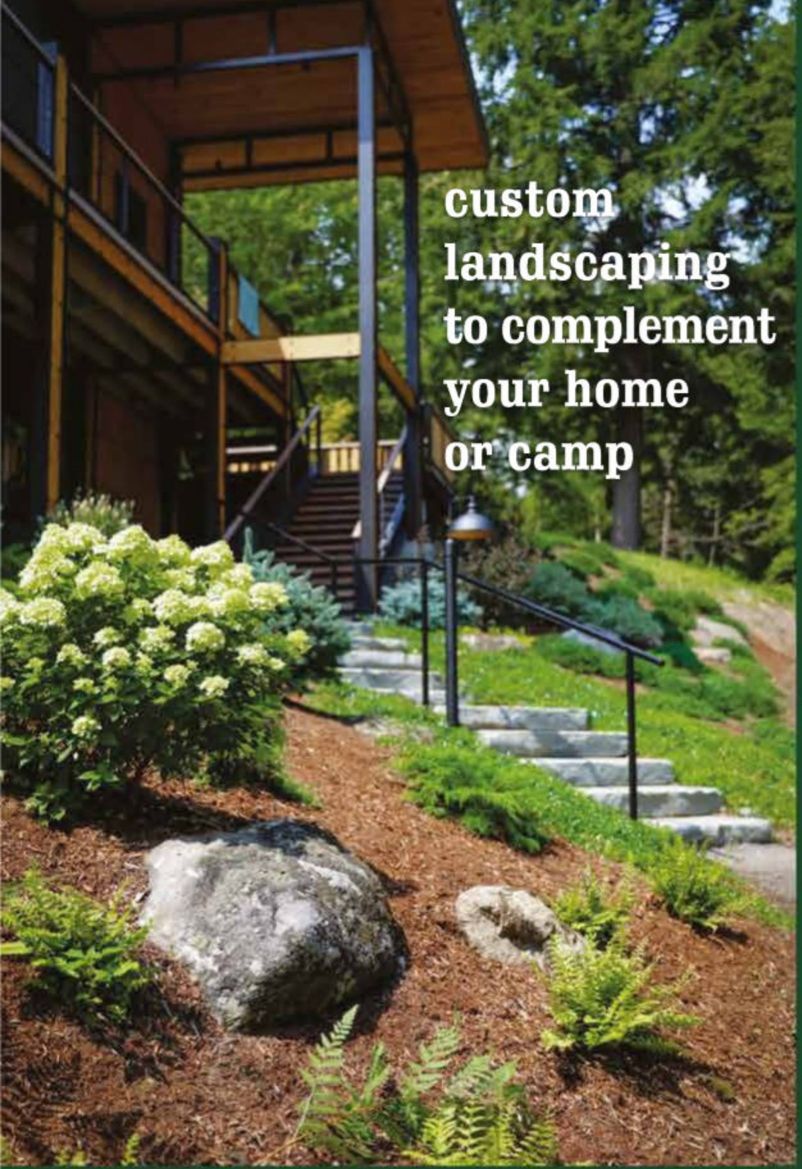
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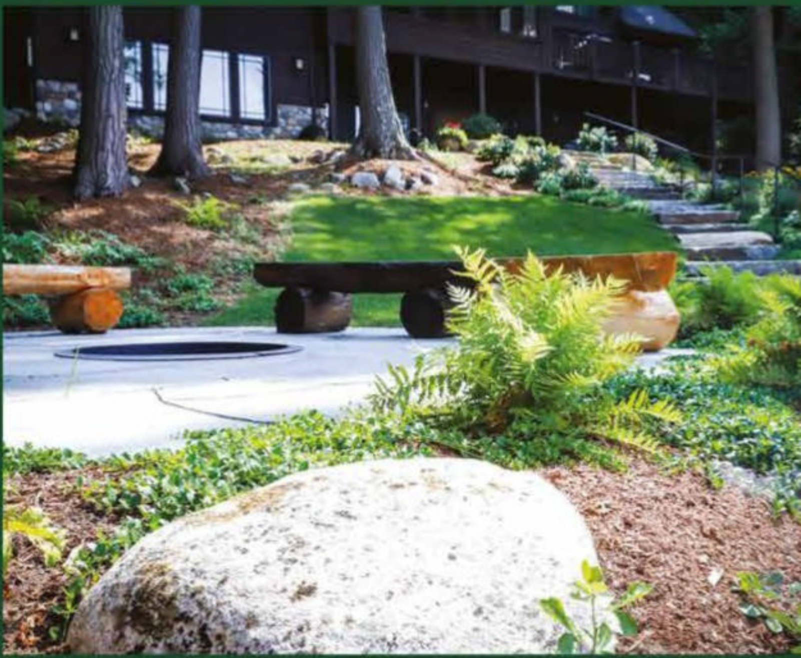

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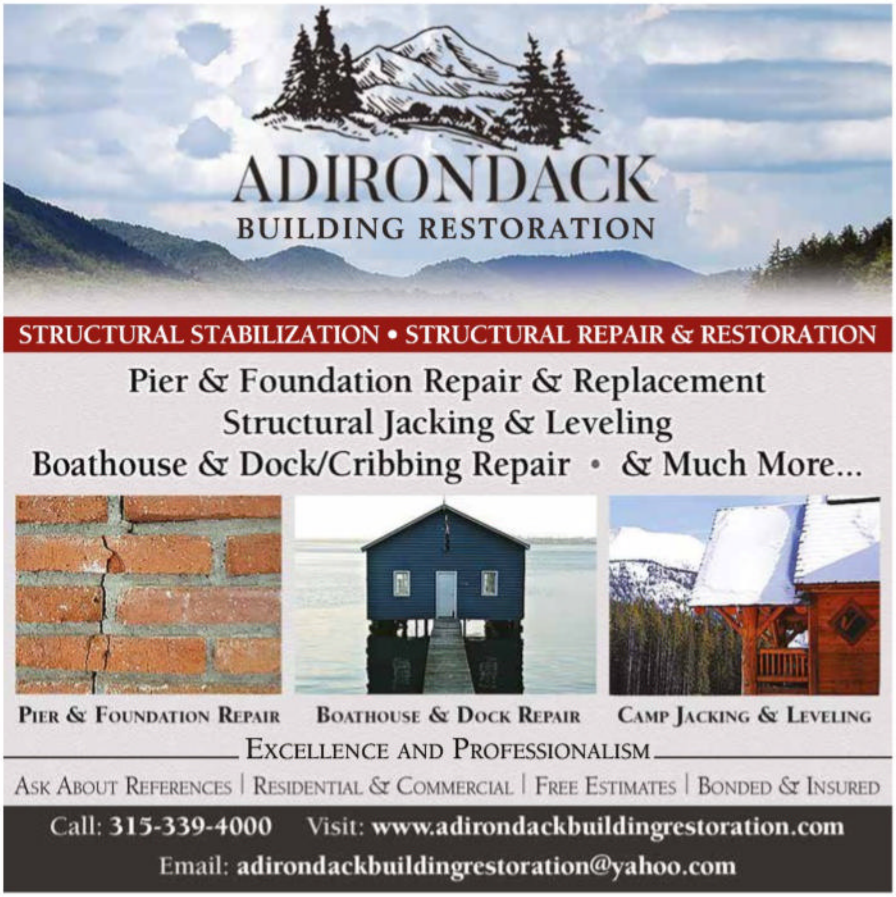
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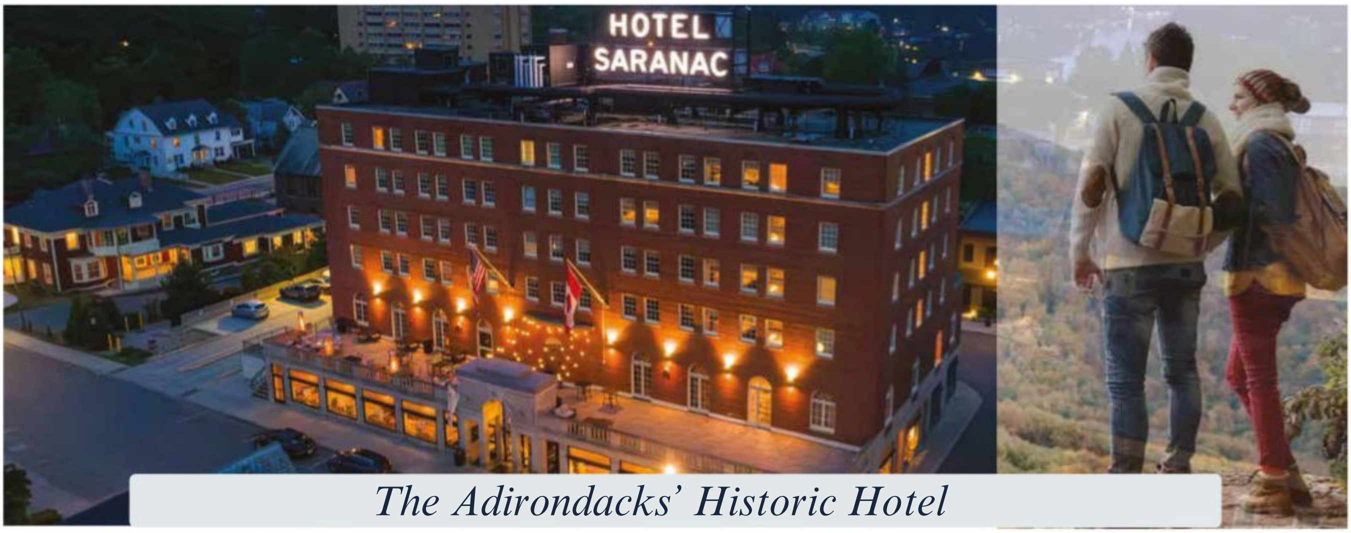
the person being called and would lead them to the nearest extension phone.

Making and maintaining fires was constant work. While the family was at dinner we placed fresh firewood in the hearth of every occupied room. We set two logs parallel across the andirons, then one diagonally on top. Fires were lit with "curly sticks," kindling peeled with a drawknife to produce long spiral shavings down two sides. They were beautiful examples of woodcraft. It seemed a shame to burn them, but they were reliable fire starters.

Fire served Kill Kare, but it was also feared. The grounds were dotted with hydrants, and a vintage, faded red firetruck sat at the ready in a barn. Our three-log blazes were designed to reduce the risk of chimney fires. A fourth and fifth log might save you a trip—or burn the place down.

As the lone Catholic among the bellhops, I had another unusual task. I had carefully avoided being an altar boy all through parochial school and thought I'd escaped the responsibility, but I was wrong. Sunday mass was the one communal event at the camp. If you followed a path into the woods from the main house you came to a beautiful chapel, a perfect miniature stone church. A priest arrived to say mass for Mrs. Garvan, and anyone could attend, guests and help included. Since the household staff worked seven days anyway, mass was well attended, even by non-Catholics. By tradition, the chauffeur acted as bell ringer. I was an inept mass server. The priest's obvious disapproval, mixed with my own Catholic guilt, made Sundays one of my least favorite days.

**I returned to Kill Kare** the next year. The job of second chauffeur was one I'd envied. The real chauffeur, Willie, drove Mrs. Garvan in her shiny black Cadillac limousine. (Willie's sole professional tip to me was to select a limo with a vinyl top; that way there's a lot less sheet metal to wax.) The second chauffeur drove everyone and everything else, and Kill Kare took a lot of provisioning to get through the summer. I left the camp every day in my official



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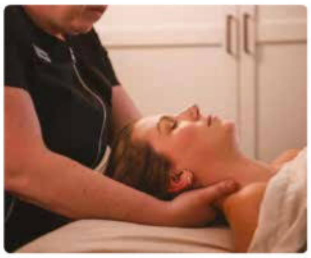

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four-wheel-drive pickup to cruise—or, to be more accurate, barrel in a cloud of dust—down into Raquette Lake for the mail, newspapers and daily supplies.

Twice weekly I drove to Inlet and Old Forge for the big grocery order, the laundry and other errands. Sometimes I went as far as Utica to pick up a guest at the airport or get items that couldn't be found in the mountains, like truffles. The second chauffeur did all this with a minimum of supervision, connected by two-way radio, but as free as the road itself. I came back for this dream job, a chance to live at Kill Kare but also escape from it daily.

Mrs. Garvan was often the only non-employee in residence at Kill Kare. Weekends occasionally brought a few other guests. (We referred to people who weren't on the payroll as guests, even though this was their home, not ours.) I don't recall there ever being more than a dozen people at one time, and those were mostly family. They passed the days quietly and were for the most part pleasant and not very demanding.

The younger generations of Garvans were more likely to expect special attention. The older people seemed to have a finely tuned sense of what was proper to ask of us or how late at night to ask it. They were of a class of people more used to having servants, and we servants, snobs in our own right, could tell the difference.

I didn't go back to Kill Kare my last college summer. This was my final footloose vacation and I couldn't see spending it working seven days a week in the middle of nowhere. I stayed in Syracuse and drove a truck, a job I got by embellishing my chauffeuring credentials.

Mrs. Garvan died in 1978, and Kamp Kill Kare later left Garvan family ownership for the first time since 1915. What century it exists in now is unknown to me. It was a fiercely private place then and apparently is still. My hope is that it continues to be a place outside of time, providing the rare summer job that offers time travel as a perk.

**This article first appeared in our 2002 *Collectors Issue.***

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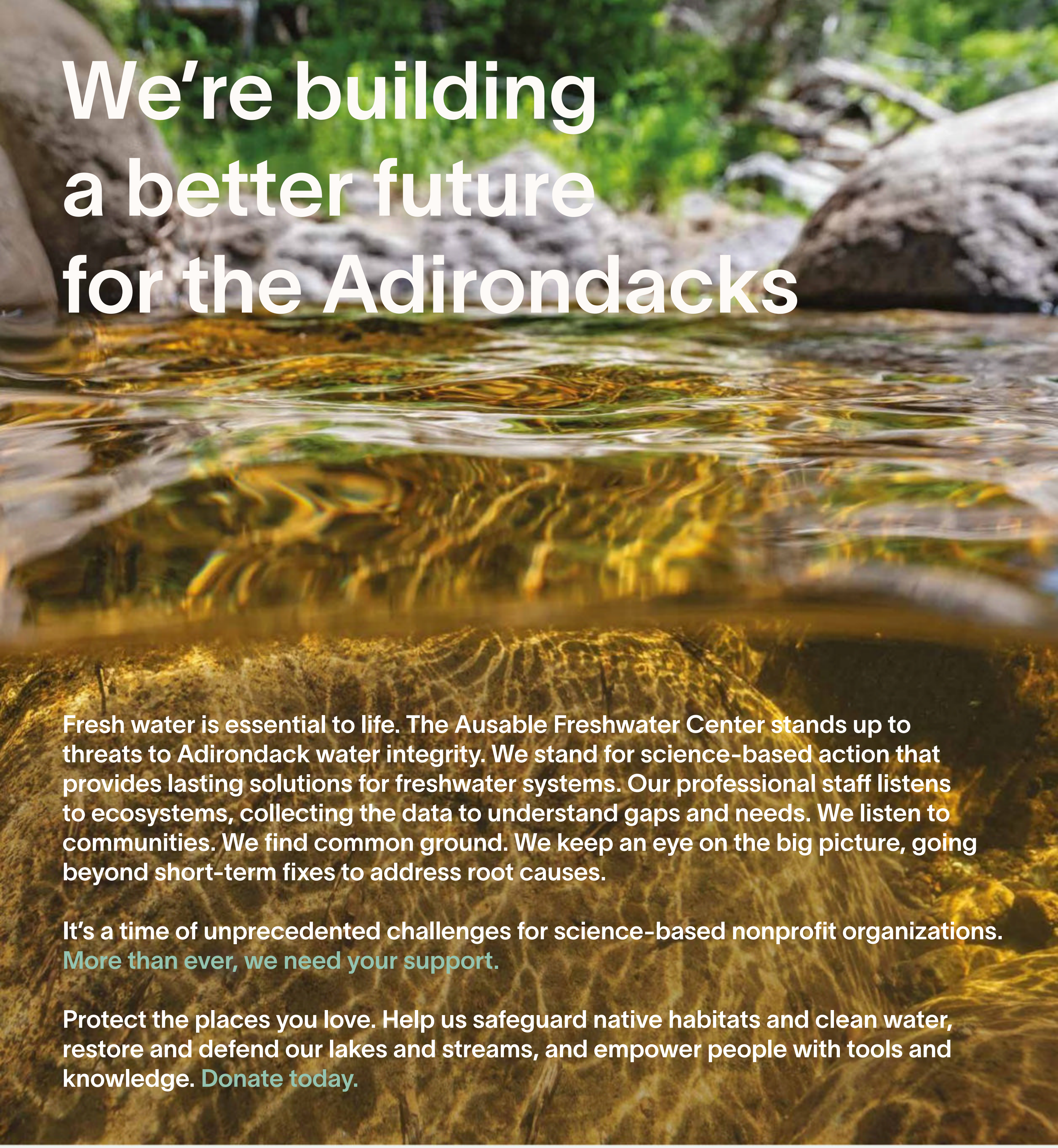

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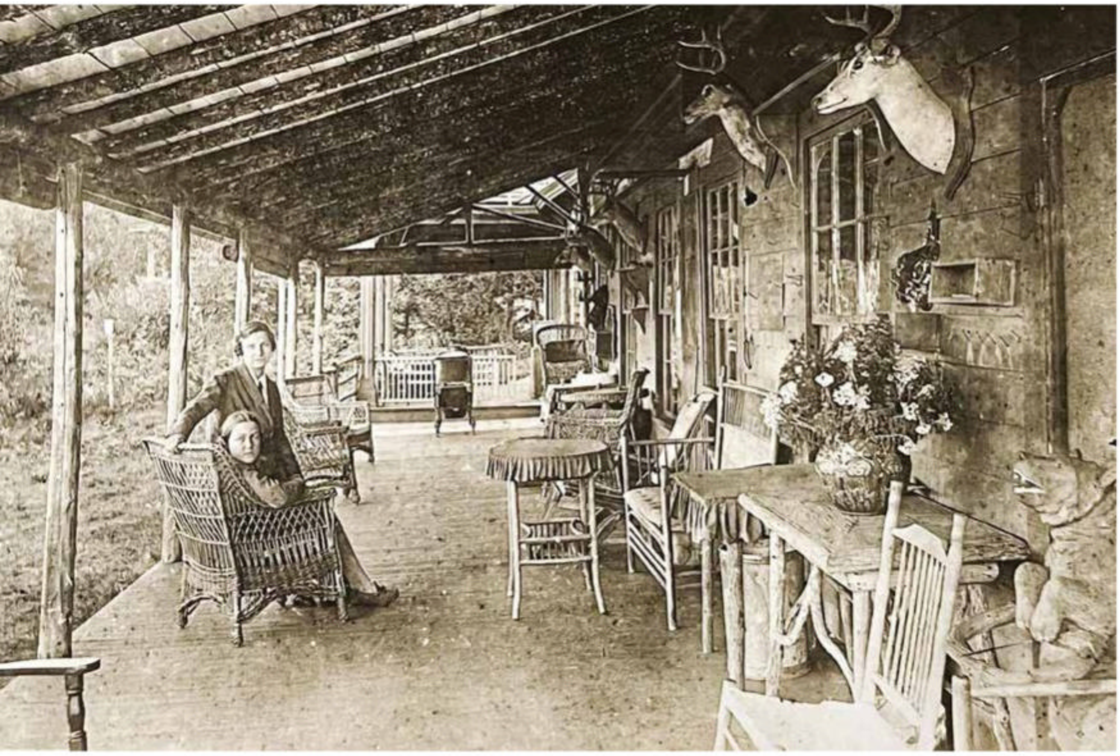
# GROWING UP BRANDRETH

Inside my family's
174-year-old legacy

*by* GINNY BRANDRETH
*photographs by* CARRIE MARIE BURR

CAMP-GOOD-ENOUGH



It's the smell of the camp when I arrive. It's the unforgiving creaks in the staircase that have tattled on generations of kids coming home late. It's the amber glow in the dining room as the light from the banquet lamps and candles bounces off the patina walls. It's seeing the barely visible words hand-painted by my great-grandmother on the original living room wall. It's all these things and more that ground me to my true home—Camp Good Enough.

---

**The Beginning: A Brewery Plan Turned Family Legacy**

In 1851, my great-great-grandfather Benjamin Brandreth, then a New York State Senator and a successful businessman, decided he would buy land in the Adirondacks in hopes of adding a thriving brewery business to his portfolio. He bought Township 39—24,000 acres—within the town of Long Lake, and by most accounts, never visited it. Sadly, the brewery concept never came to life. Two of his sons, Franklin and Ralph, urged their mother to pay the taxes on the land while Benjamin was in Europe on business, and so began the 174-year-old legacy of Brandreth Park.

Beach's Cabin, a small hunting camp, was on the property when Benjamin made his purchase and it still stands today. Franklin, Ralph, other siblings and their guests would make the four-and-a-half-day trip from Sing Sing, New York—now Ossining—to fish and hunt their Adirondack land. They added another building for cooking and expanded accommodations, then, in 1874, built a bunkhouse. In 1878 Franklin brought his entire family to Brandreth Lake. His wife, Pauline, fell in love with the raw simplicity of buildings that were constructed from the trees on site, and had dirt floors and handmade furnishings. She named the camp "Haven of Rest."

**LEFT:**
On the porch at Camp Good Enough, circa 1890.

**PAGES 34–35:**
The camp today, with a view of Brandreth Lake, one of more than a dozen bodies of water in the family's preserve.

**RIGHT:**
In 1848 guide John Plumley led one of Benjamin Brandreth's colleagues into the wilderness to find a suitable property to buy. They came upon Beach's Lake, where they discovered a half-submerged boat along the shoreline. It was later salvaged and turned into a bookshelf.

RANDRETH
1843

**RIGHT:**
Brandreth Park—shared by hundreds of Benjamin Brandreth descendants—is the oldest private family preserve in the Adirondacks.

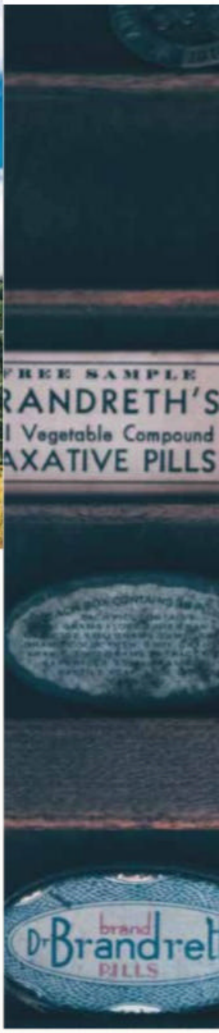
**LEFT:**
Camp Good Enough's dining room, where Ginny Brandreth and family gather for celebrations over the same china used by her ancestors 150 years ago.

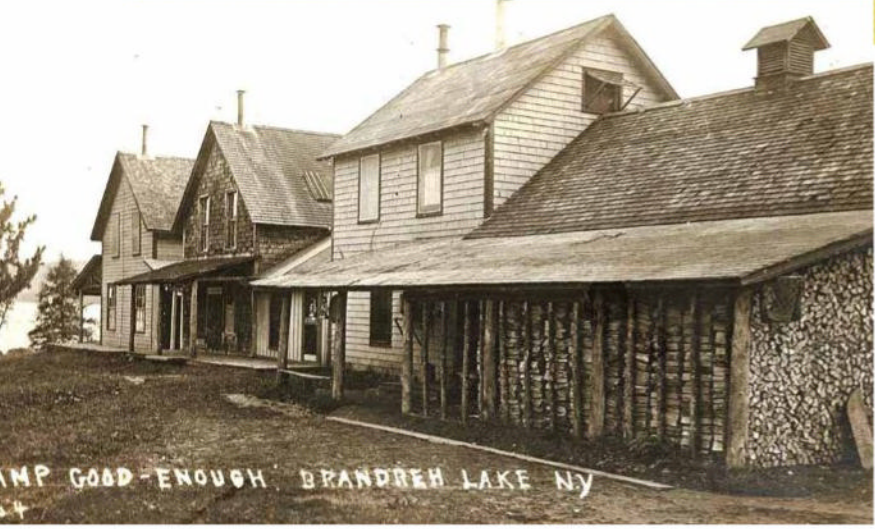
That moniker lasted until 1886, when it became clear more space was needed. Ralph claimed the cabin and kitchen building, while Franklin, casting an eye to the bunkhouse, said, "I'll take that, it's good enough for me." This decision sparked my family camp's name. It was also the beginning of expanding the existing camps and adding outbuildings. Ralph and Franklin's brother-in-law General Edward A. "E. A." McAlpin constructed a large camp with its own set of outbuildings. From then on, E. A.'s Camp Comfort, Ralph's Camp MisRule and Franklin's Camp Good Enough took on lives of their own.

### The Golden Years

Camp Good Enough eventually grew to 13 buildings, mostly clustered behind the main building, with the barn and shop somewhat farther from the compound. Each "room" was its own building. One for the dining room, kitchen, ice house, staff, and each of Franklin and Pauline's four children—Beatrice, Virginia, Paulina and Courtenay (my grandfather). With the completion of William Seward Webb's railroad in 1892, the trip to camp was reduced to one long day, and the Brandreth Station—eight miles from the camps—became the entry point for family, guests and provisions.

Camp Good Enough was host to large house parties that lasted for many weeks, and the logbooks reveal an incredible number of fish and deer taken to sustain the entourage. Franklin and





Pauline's daughter, Virginia, married Fox Conner, a man bound to become a Major General during World War I, and mentor to notables such as General "Black Jack" Pershing, George Marshall and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Pershing and Marshall visited the family at Camp Good Enough, and were guided on successful hunts by the Brandreths' other daughter, Paulina, aka Paul Brandreth, a gifted hunter, angler and author.

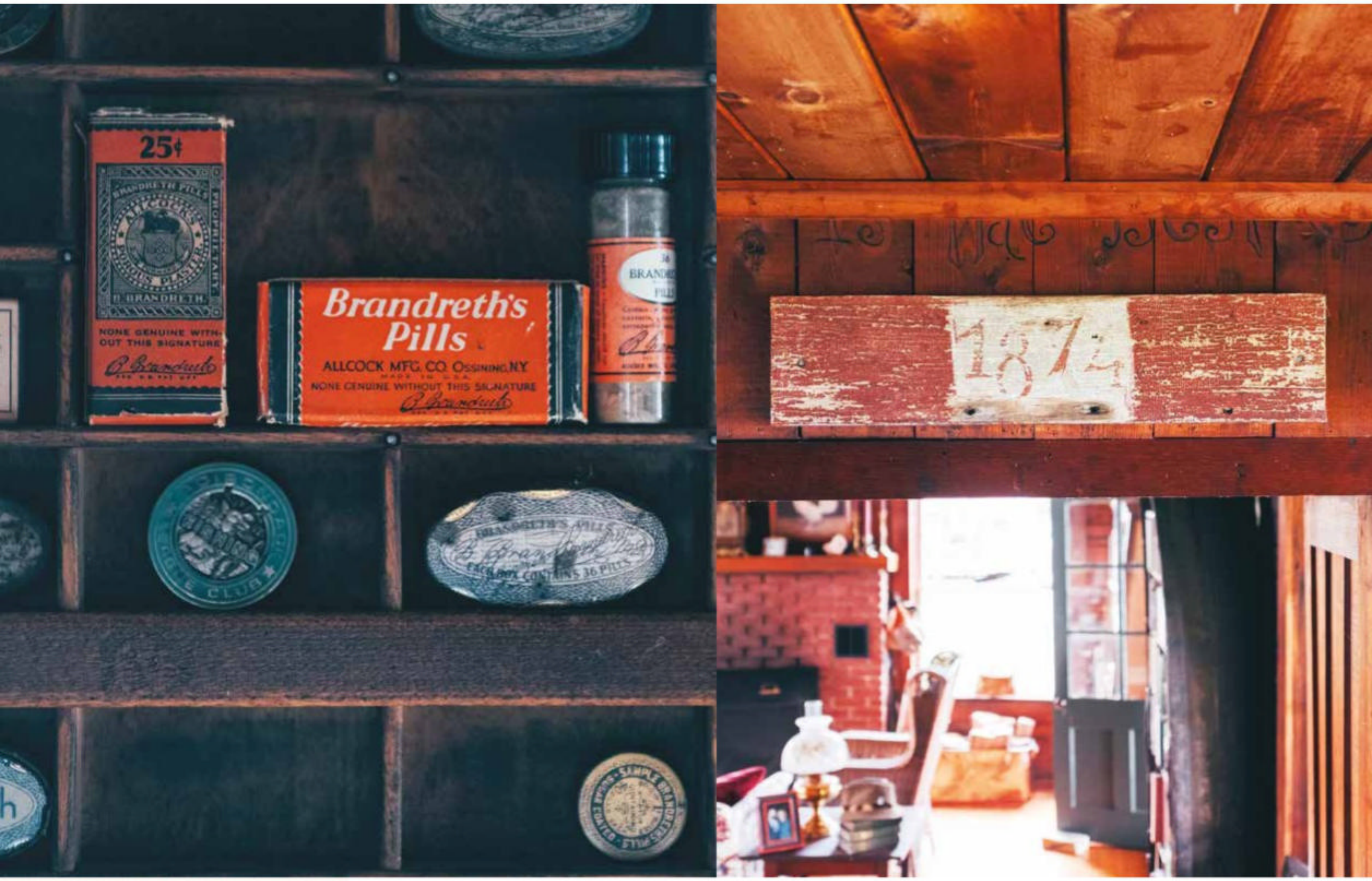
### The Challenging Years

Brandreth Park thrived in the first four decades of the 1900s. The camps were lively in the summers, and the staff busy in the off-season with repairs, stocking firewood and making ice. A lumbering company that was started by General McAlpin on the property boomed with 25 lumber camps, a mill, extended railroad sidings, and the town of Brandreth at The Station as the hub. But World War II took its toll on Brandreth Park. Lumber camps were abandoned, the mill shut down, and life at The Station and at the camps pivoted. My grandfather, Courtenay, had passed away and the years of deferred maintenance took their toll on Camp Good Enough, left to his wife, Elinor, and their children Elinor and Franklin. Ultimately, the keys were turned over to Franklin, my father, and with the only inhabitants being bats and mice, he was left with a compound of buildings calling for help.

My mother, Cynthia, first visited Brandreth Lake in 1954, with her soon-to-be mother-in-law, Elinor. Mom's first call to duty was tossing mice-infested mattresses out the windows and sweeping up bat guano while curious cousins

**ABOVE:** Ginny Brandreth and her mother, Cynthia. Camp Good Enough expanded to 13 buildings, each with a specific function. In the 1950s Ginny's dad, Franklin, gave away or dismantled many of them, creating a getaway that was easier to maintain.

HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR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**ABOVE:** Among the camp's artifacts on display are Brandreth pill boxes. Benjamin Brandreth, born in Leeds, England, moved to the U.S. in 1835 and began making and selling patented cure-alls and plaster bandages—the source of his fortune.

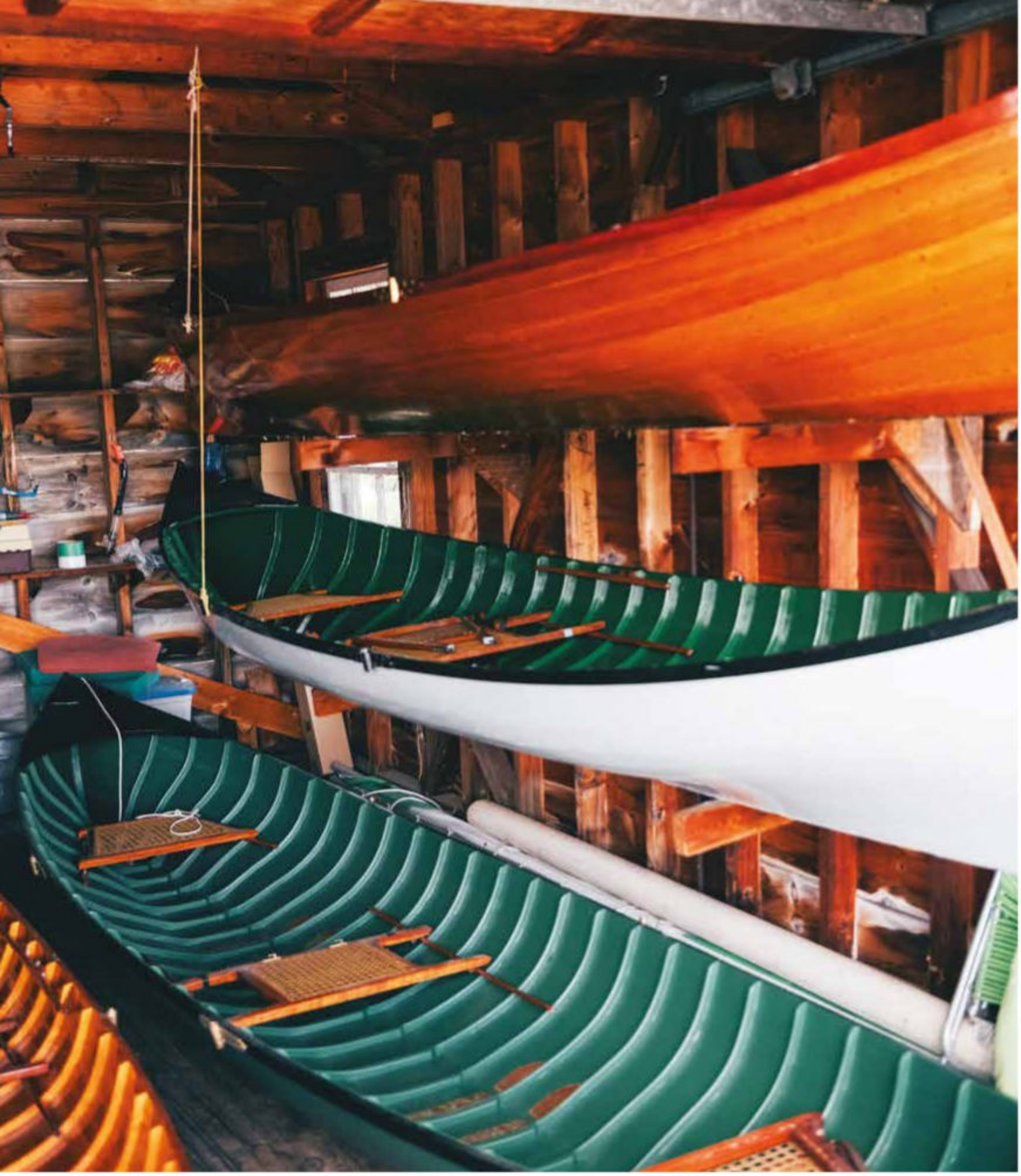
looked on, inspecting Mom to see if she had the fortitude to be a Brandreth wife.

### Dad's Practical Approach

Faced with his camp's 13 buildings in various states of "fit," Dad made the property easier to maintain by trimming down the building count by giving away buildings. His sister took two to add to her camp; two other buildings were moved by tractor near "the shop," which had become yet another cousin's camp; one building was dismantled and taken to nearby Salmon Lake; another was moved to become a second cousin's camp; the barn became Brandreth Park's caretaker barn; and other buildings were torn down.

Dad, in his mission to save Camp Good Enough, had to be efficient. The main camp, once a living room with some bedrooms upstairs, was renovated to include a kitchen, dining room, living room, bathroom and four upstairs bedrooms, including mine. The outbuildings were renovated into a shop, woodshed, garage for the camp truck, and accommodations for summer help and guests.

From then on, Dad was always working on a camp project. He labored over his guideboats, one always up on sawhorses on the side porch for a minor repair or a complete strip-down to be rebuilt again. Dad was known to have a tool for any project and was often asked to lend one out. Dad noted these requests by listing the person's name, tool and, if the request was granted or declined. Eventually, a "No Tool Loans" sign went up on. (Franklin didn't mince words.) Mom, being the cheery soul she is, hung a "Welcome" sign above it.



**RIGHT:** What served as the preserve's post office is now a community library. Ginny's dog, Dacks.

**LEFT:** Ginny's family's collection of guideboats, among them boats made by legendary Long Lake guides Reuben Cary and Wallace Emerson.

**Growing Up at Camp**

We lived in New Hartford, close enough to Brandreth that it was easy to come up on weekends. I spent my summers at camp with my mother, grandmother and sister, Cindy, while my father worked back at home. Brandreth Park is off the grid, but the lack of electricity never phased any of us. Propane, and after that, generators, provided what we needed for kitchen appliances and pumping water. Hand-powered kitchen tools and kerosene lamps created a place that time had forgotten as well as a connection to a past of self-reliance. Our phone lines came in from Raquette Lake and were crackly and unreliable, so we walked camp to camp to see our cousins and organize our fun.

Camp Good Enough is at the center of the compound, so it was, and still is, abuzz with activity. Clusters of kids would thump onto the back porch and swing open the screen door to see what was happening. Giving up on keeping track of names, my grandmother took to calling everyone "Dearie." Now I find myself doing the same thing.

Our large extended family—today more than 200 cousins with 40-plus camps—gives each generation a cluster of companions, or co-conspirators, with whom to build memories. When I was growing up at Brandreth, we spent days

at the beach playing King of the Raft, we hiked and picnicked, or at night played Kick the Can, Capture the Flag or Escape and Evasion. There was plenty of fun to be had. On the quieter nights my sister and I played canasta or gin rummy with my grandmother and mother, then listened to my grandmother play the piano as we fell asleep.

### The Island Adventure

Spending the night in the lean-to on The Island, at the opposite end of Brandreth Lake, is practically a requirement of growing up at Brandreth. With motorboats prohibited on the lake, the mile-long row to get there gives kids a sense of independence. Typically there's a story of some harmless incident, like a late-night storm or prank, that makes the outing a lifetime memory.

I was 12 when my cousin Holly and I were allowed to join our big sisters on a sleep-out at The Island. I was so excited that I didn't mind that the big sisters got to sleep in the lean-to and Holly and I had to sleep on the ground outside. As night fell we giggled and told stories about our cousins—who was fun, who was cranky—when suddenly handfuls of dirt were thrown at us. Out from the trees and ferns rose a couple of monsters! We screamed and ran as we tried to catch the monsters—our older cousins who had come to scare us. They had brought a small army with them with getaway boats, ready for their escape.

That sort of assault was not to be taken lightly. Another cousin Wendy and I decided that we should row back to camp immediately. To do what? We didn't yet know, but we were going anyway. When we got there we crept around the invaders' camp, next door to my family's Camp Good Enough, and found it—my cousin's treasured Yale hockey jersey hanging on a clothesline. The perfect prize. Back down the lake to The Island we rowed, just in time for the sun to rise. Later, we told our furious cousin that we had left the | *Continued on page 68*

Adirondack
architects
reimagine
the outhouse

# Privy *Cool*

## David Kornmeyer

**THIS DESIGN IS INFLUENCED BY THE AGING OUTHOUSE** at my childhood hunting camp in the southwestern Adirondacks, which left much to be desired in comforts and required some skill in avoiding getting stuck inside with another person, due to its “double-holer” design.

The Perch, as I’m calling it, has a simple gable form, extruded and sculpted to create view, circulation and mark entry. Clad in seamless black pine tar–coated shakes with a red pine tar–raised base, it ties back to traditional Adirondack vernacular, while being an unexpected and exciting form in the wild landscape. It is infused with comforts such as a rainwater catchment system to supply a pump sink, stone-clad seat for durability and easy cleaning, mouse-proof storage cabinet, and a small rooftop solar system to power LED lighting for those night trips. The interior is clad in local hemlock shiplap for a warm and familiar feeling, with a large opening that frames the forested landscape beyond, creating a space for necessity and reflection.

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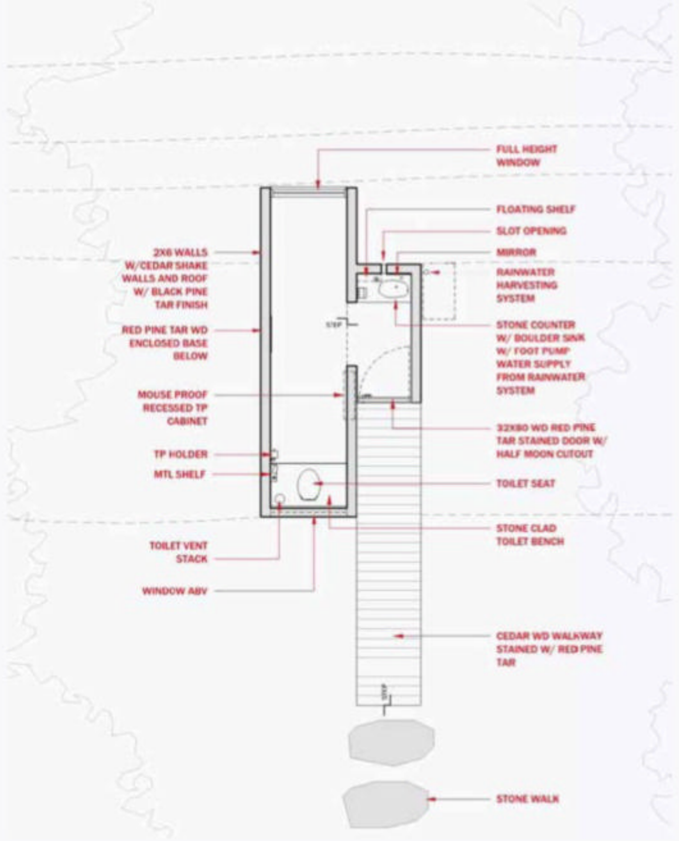
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32X80 WD RED PINE TAR STAINED DOOR W/ HALF MOON CUTOUT
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STONE CLAD TOILET BENCH
CEDAR WD WALKWAY STAINED W/ RED PINE TAR
STONE WALK
2X6 WALLS W/CEDAR SHAKE WALLS AND ROOF W/ BLACK PINE TAR FINISH
RED PINE TAR WD ENCLOSED BASE BELOW
MOUSE PROOF RECESSED TP CABINET
TP HOLDER
MTL SHELF
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WINDOW ABV
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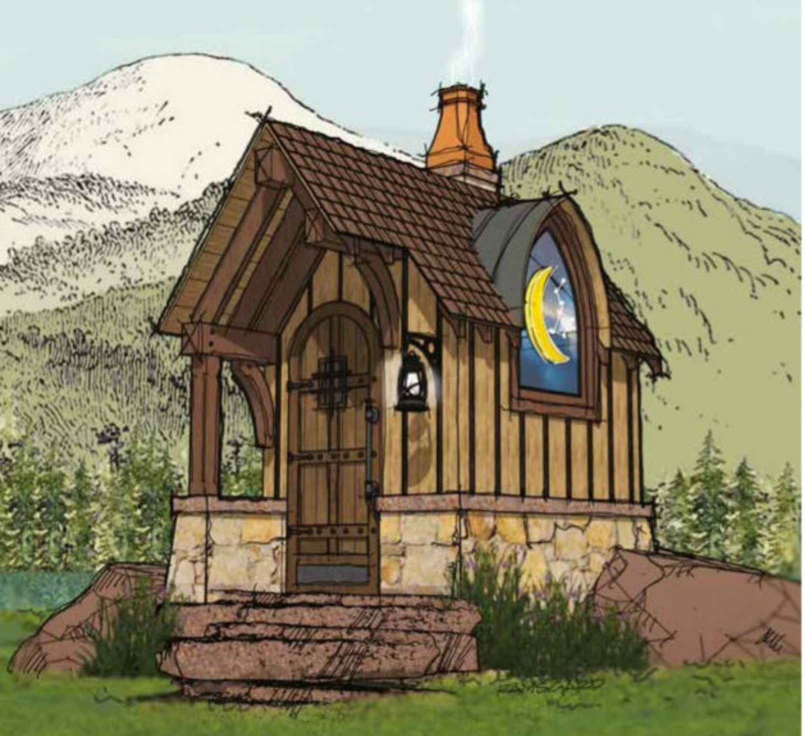

## Andrew Ramsgard

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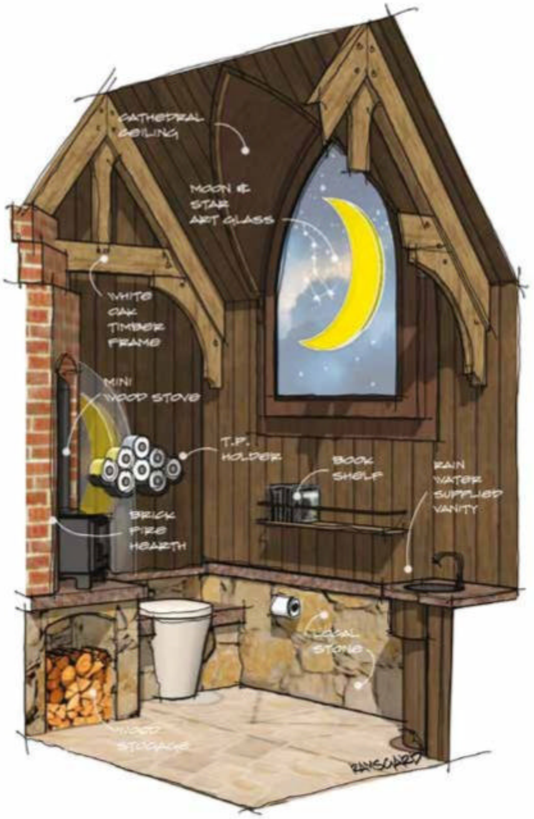
CATHEDRAL CEILING
MOON & STAR ART GLASS
WHITE OAK TIMBER FRAME
MINI WOOD STOVE
T.P. HOLDER
BOOK SHELF
RAIN WATER SUPPLIED VANITY
BRICK FIRE HEARTH
LOCAL STONE
WOOD STORAGE
RAMSGARD

## Chris White

**I'M READING A. B. GUTHRIE'S *THE BIG SKY*,** and Boone Caudill calls the decorative crescent in outhouse doors "the moon hole," so my inspiration in this design was to not think about letting light in, but getting a view out. The Adirondacks offers an opportunity to take in night skies without artificial light pollution, to see deeper into space and its stars and planets. When conditions are just right, you might also catch the northern lights. On your moonlit visit to the commode, why not have the opportunity to look up and observe the dazzling display of the night sky above?

This outhouse is circular in plan and the walls are clad in a corrugated metal, a durable and weather-resistant material. The cedar shingle–clad roof sits in contrast to the metal and slopes up on the interior to direct your gaze to the large skylight, angled to optimize site-specific views of the sky above. On the interior, two or three composting-toilet stalls ring the circular exterior wall, and users can pick the best seat in the (out)house on any particular night.

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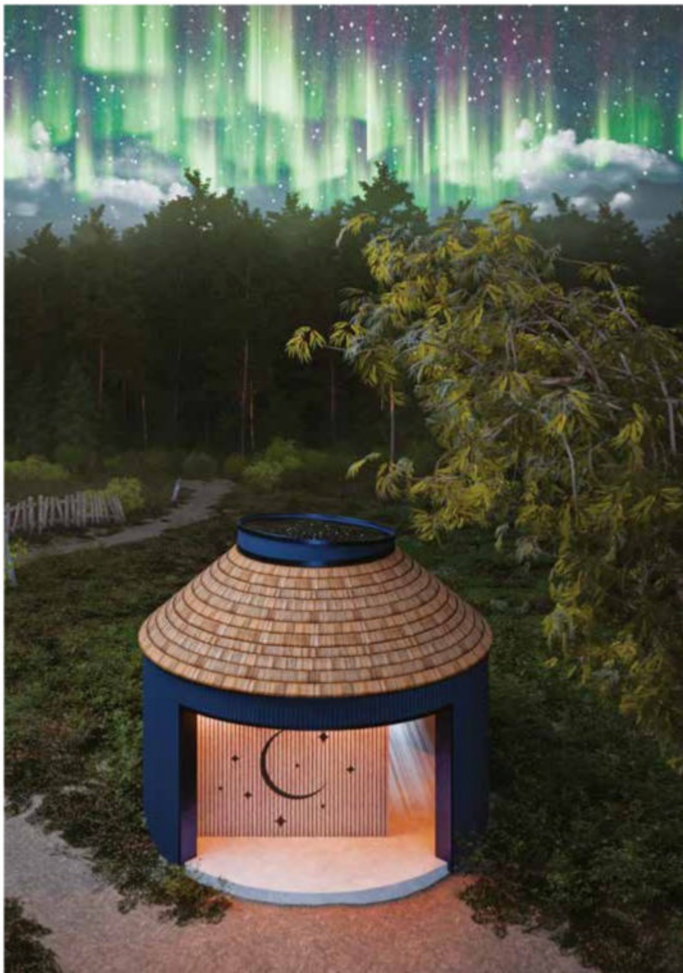

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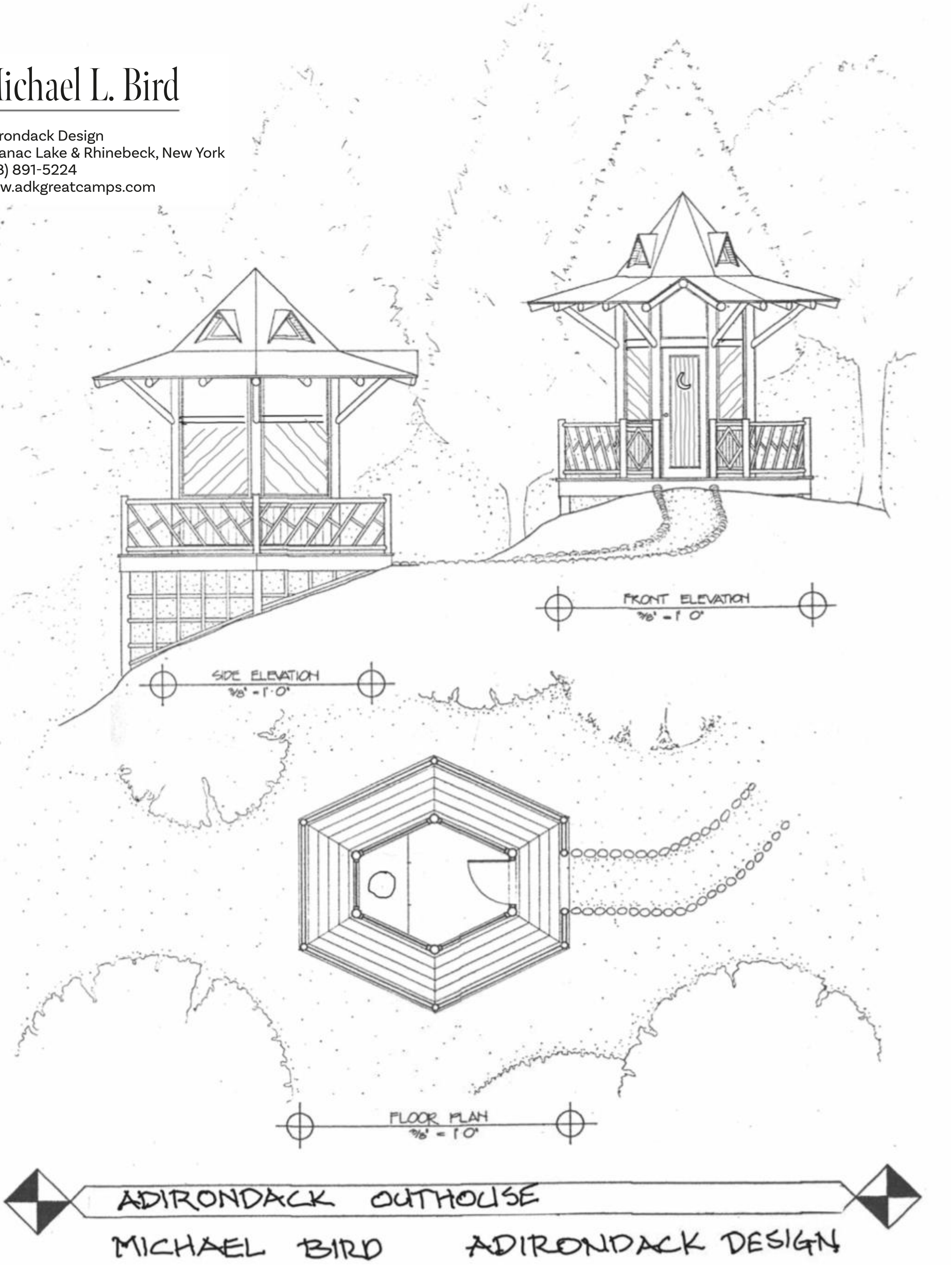
FRONT ELEVATION
3/8" = 1' 0"
SIDE ELEVATION
3/8" = 1' 0"
FLOOR PLAN
3/8" = 1' 0"
ADIRONDACK OUTHOUSE
MICHAEL BIRD
ADIRONDACK DESIGN

# Treasure Island

The unexpected riches—and the family who saved them—at Saranac Lake's Robert Louis Stevenson Cottage

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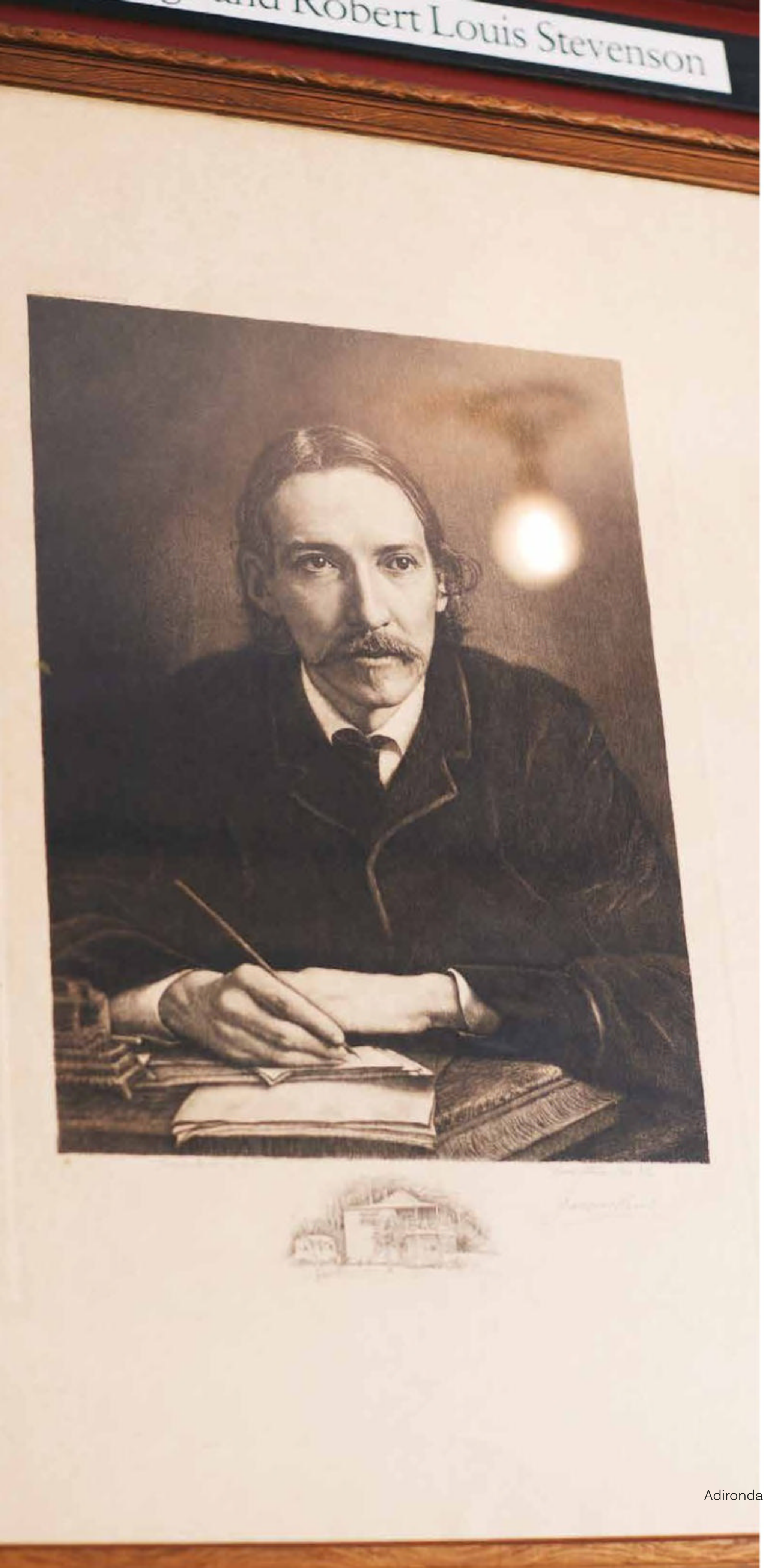
*by* TIM ROWLAND
*photographs by* YVONNE ALBINOWSKI

The ailing author spent the winter of 1887–'88 under the care of Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau; his modest lodging is now a museum.



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**EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS BEFORE** the Beatles, the sickly Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson arrived in New York City to a pulsating throng of adoring fans and, like John Lennon, pondered whether he might be more popular than Jesus.

This was far better treatment than he had received across the pond, where he'd been fleeced by publishers, and highbrow Europeans had wrinkled their noses at his newly released tale of Jekyll and Hyde. Stevenson was bound for the Rocky Mountains in hopes of reclaiming his health, but his fragile constitution was so rattled by the cacophonous city, it was feared he wouldn't make it that far. Instead, he was assigned to the care of Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau, of Saranac Lake, who was said to be working miracles on tuberculosis, then the world's leading cause of death.

In late 1887, Stevenson and his entourage stepped off the train in the heart of the Adirondacks and found a modest cottage for rent, owned by a family named Baker on a quiet country lane free from the crowds.

Or so he thought. Fame had beaten Stevenson to this remote outpost, and fans streamed to his door, so many that he could frequently be found, not on the cure porch, but hiding from his adoring throngs in a little room off the kitchen.

Today the cottage, now a museum, remains, but the crowds are gone. Stevenson of course is long gone too, except he's there in spirit, his memory kept alive by 74-year-old Mike Delahant, a salty live-in curator with a shock of white hair and a passing resemblance to

**Mike Delahant, the cottage's live-in curator, is the third generation of his family to steward what has become one of the most important collections of Stevenson artifacts in the world.**

actor Lloyd Bridges.

The Delahant and Stevenson trajectories have entwined since 1953, when Mike's grandfather took control of the cottage from an increasingly disinterested town.

"I'm confident we wouldn't have the cottage today if not for the Delahants," said Trenton B. Olsen, an associate professor of English at Brigham Young University–Idaho and a leading Stevenson scholar. Olsen first set foot in the cottage in 2023 and was amazed at the breadth and rarity of the collection, which includes, to pick one, a bas relief of Stevenson created by Gutzon Borglum, sculptor of Mount Rushmore.

These relics jam the rooms where Stevenson once paced in search of plots, and where Delahant once played as his grandfather and then father did what they could on a shoestring budget to keep the place alive.

"I felt like I knew him when I looked up at his bust," Delahant said. "He just seemed like a cousin, somebody in the family that brought us all together every summer."

But as a teen, Delahant was over it. Preserving all this "crap" was someone else's calling, not his. Disappointing his Yale-educated father, Delahant wanted to get away from the cottage, so he went out West, earning money cleaning hotel carpets.

Olsen sees echoes of Stevenson in Delahant, both sons of engineers who struggled to meet expectations. In Stevenson's case, there would be no one to continue the business of designing lighthouses. In Delahant's, no one would be left to, say, tell the story of how a signed photo of Stevenson lounging in the cottage bedroom had been given to magazine magnate Sam McClure, who in turn gave it to the great novelist Henry James.

Somehow that photograph found its way back to the Stevenson Cottage. And somehow Delahant did too.

For both Robert Louis Stevenson and Saranac Lake, the winter of 1887 to '88 had been transformative. Stevenson got better and went on a writing tear that produced some of his most critically acclaimed work. And his visit brought to Saranac Lake publicity that money couldn't buy. If Trudeau could cure the notoriously poorly Stevenson, surely he could raise the dead, or at least make them twitch.

Stevenson probably did not have tuberculosis, but his improved health was endorsement enough to inspire a parade of wealthy and influential consumptives who came to the Adirondacks and often maintained a lifelong connection. In fewer than two years Saranac Lake's population soared from a couple hundred to 768. By 1930 it would reach 8,000.

By the time of Delahant's return in 1980, antibiotics had driven a stake in both tuberculosis and the Saranac Lake medi-tourism trade. Its population had receded to less than 6,000, and jobs were scarce, so a pending offer of free housing was not one to be taken lightly.

The free house, of course, was the Stevenson Cottage, which was in need of a watchman to see to it that no one grabbed any relics and put them on whatever the 1980 equivalent of eBay happened to be.

To Olsen, it's the best Stevenson collection in the world, and it's certainly the oldest. For 30 years, when anyone anywhere had a piece of Stevenson memorabilia with no particular destination for it, they sent it to Saranac Lake.

But the Stevenson Society never had money to organize it all, or to keep the cottage in half-decent repair. When Delahant returned in 1980, the boiler didn't work, nor did the bathroom plumbing, and plaster was falling from the walls.

More for his own comfort than the collection's, Delahant picked up some

tools and got to work. And he picked up something else: a copy of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Gradually, all that "crap" from his youth began to speak to him. A few decades of research later, the former carpet cleaner is considered to be among the world's leading Stevenson scholars. With his wife, Karla, he continued to make improvements and repairs, as he learned the stories behind each relic.

"I learned to see artifacts, not so much on their own, but in context," Delahant said. "The inscribed *Treasure Island*, the only one on public view in the world, is right in this room. How did that get here? Well, because the Bakers outlived all five of their kids. Ralph Baker was 15 when Stevenson personally gave him the book for Christmas, and he was 22 when he died of typhus. So, naturally, the mother ain't gonna throw that book out."

With no living Baker heirs, there was no one to leave the cottage to, no one to remodel those sacred rooms, sell off the furniture or sand down the mantelpiece burns from Stevenson's cigarettes. A family's loss was history's gain.

In Olsen's view, both the cottage and Delahant are national treasures, something no Adirondack visitor with any literary bent should miss. (Delahant, in turn, said his dad would be thrilled that an actual English professor is now head of the Stevenson Society.)

So with quiet urgency, Olsen and a reinvigorated board have set out on a quest to pump new life into the cottage. A capital campaign has raised $90,000, about a third of what is needed for a new roof and repairs to the foundation and such. The collection is being cataloged with plans for a more structured display, interpretation and protection.

Delahant has now spent 45 years as curator, a year longer than Stevenson walked the Earth. He's poured all his time and money into the cottage, a tribute to Stevenson, but also as a way of making amends to his father for youthful transgressions.

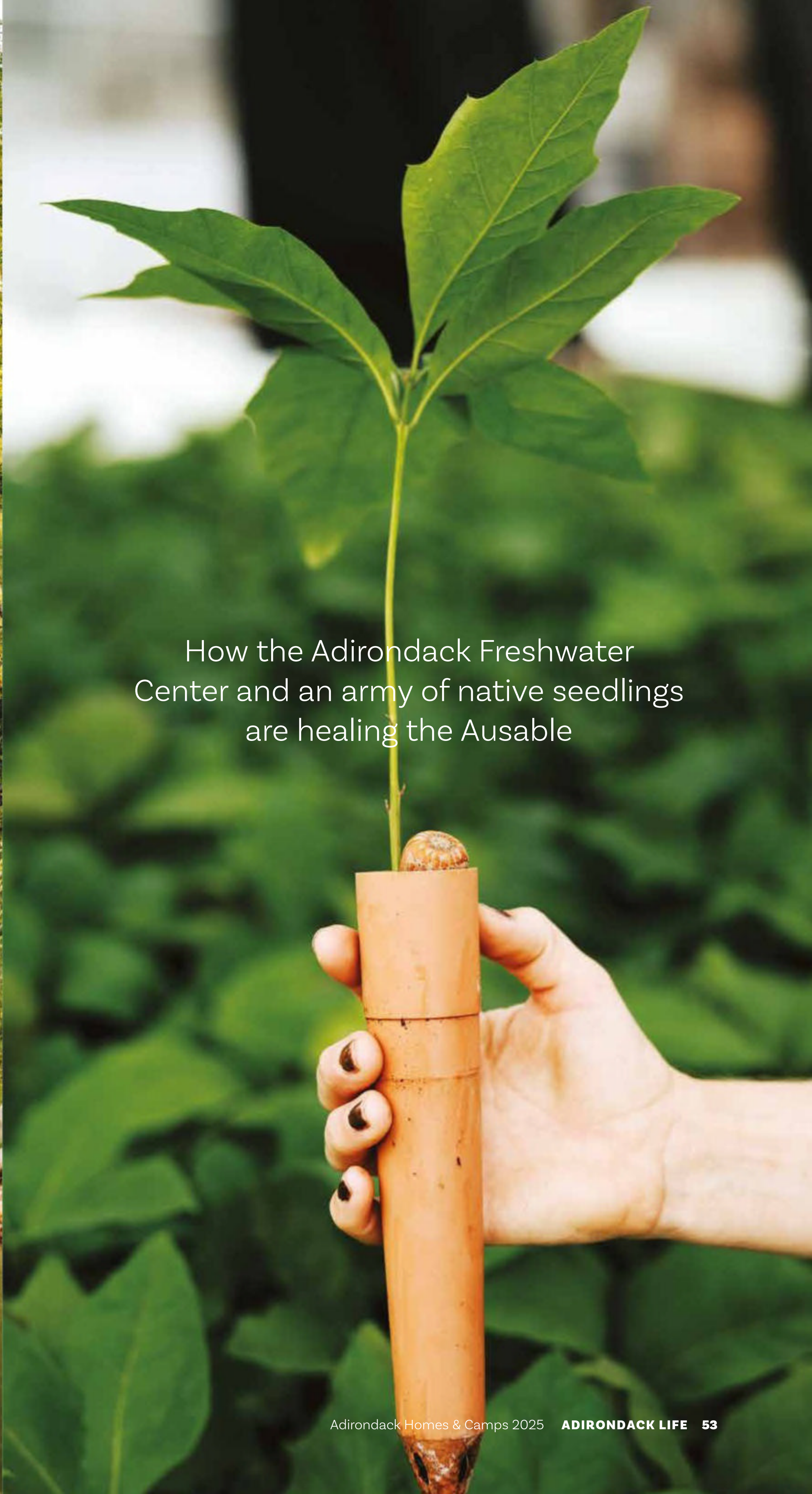
"My father, without saying, I knew he was hoping that I would take to this place," he said. "So I figured, well, if there's one thing I have an opportunity to do, I can make sure this place doesn't disappear. And if he could come back now and see the [stuff] that's been done, he'd be pretty happy."

**The Robert Louis Stevenson Cottage Museum (518-891-1462, rlscottagemuseum.org) is at 44 Stevenson Lane.**

# The River Fixers

*by* PAUL GREENBERG

*photographs by* JAMIE WEST MCGIVER



How the Adirondack Freshwater Center and an army of native seedlings are healing the Ausable

Ausable Freshwater Center's plant nursery at Uihlein Farm, in Lake Placid. The organization's executive director Kelley Tucker and, in its greenhouse, curator Kiana French.

**THERE WAS A MOMENT** when Kelley Tucker realized, quite to her horror, that she had been absolutely right.

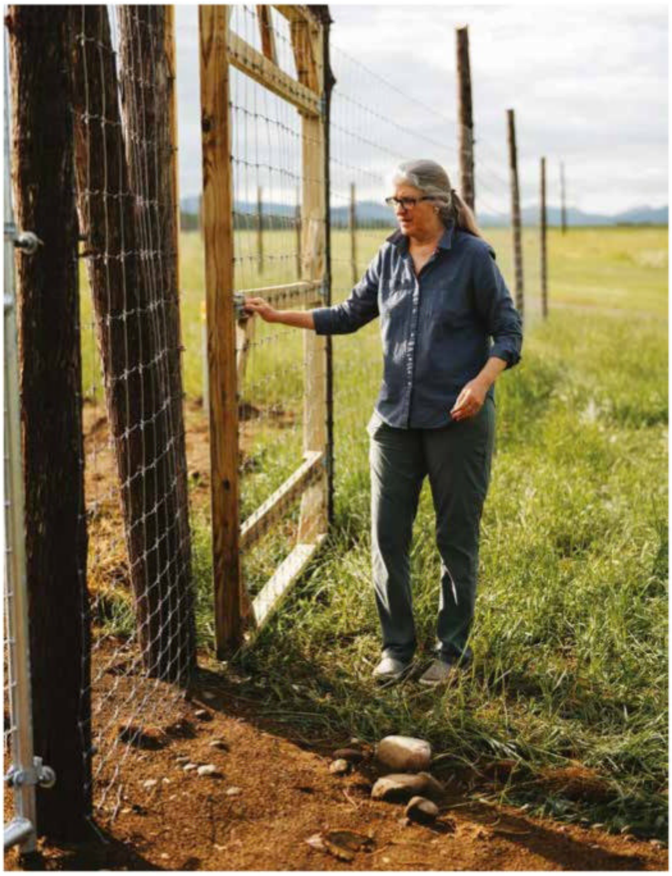
It was the afternoon of August 28th, 2011. Rain had been falling steadily all day long—nothing unusual for a socked-in, Adirondack summer day. But as the hours went by the weather started to feel somehow bigger than your average downpour. A tropical depression had been pummeling town after town as it inched its way up the East Coast. Finally, when the slow-moving storm parked itself above the Adirondacks, all Tucker could do was stand along the East Branch of the Ausable River next to a friend and offer a running commentary on what floated by.

"What's that over there? Is it—yep, that's the neighbor's barn. What about that thing, what's that? Oh no, that's the neighbor's tractor."

What she was witnessing was something that her highly trained eye had perceived as an inevitability. As an ecological anthropologist who grew up around the Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers, Tucker knew a flood-vulnerable river when she saw one. She knew how eroded banks, slipshod road building and poorly managed hydraulics could triple down into a full-fledged disaster. She didn't want to be some kind of environmental Cassandra, shouting hysterically about make-believe catastrophes. She wanted to be wrong. But she wasn't.

By the time Tropical Storm Irene moved on, the Ausable River's rage had washed away portions of Au Sable Forks, Jay, Upper Jay, Keene and other hamlets. Roads and homes, businesses and roadside attractions, including the actual Land of Makebelieve, a former theme park in Upper Jay, were swamped. A total of $25 million in damages sat on the ledgers of hamlets whose combined annual budgets were a mere $4 million. Eventually Tucker decided that she could no

> Kelley Tucker knew a flood-vulnerable river when she saw one. She knew how eroded banks, slipshod road building and poorly managed hydraulics could triple down into a full-fledged disaster.



The Center grows native seedlings including Bebb willow and silver maple that will be planted along the Ausable and other Adirondack rivers.

longer be a passive onlooker.

The executive director job at the Ausable River Association—now called the Ausable Freshwater Center—became available in 2014. Though she'd been looking forward to flying her four-seater airplane and easing toward a semi-retirement, she did the opposite. She sold her plane and took up the reins of an organization that had been tasked with reining in a monster.

**WHILE KELLEY TUCKER** was right about the potential disaster the Ausable could wreak, the extent of the damage came as a surprise to many in the Adirondacks, because for centuries we've been getting things so wrong when it comes to rivers. Rivers in general and the Ausable in particular have historically borne the brunt of abuse when humans decide they want to "develop" a wilderness. In the Ausable's case, that development was marked by successive years of logging right down to the water's edge. During this period the Ausable was transformed into a giant flume with ramrods of scouring logs busting through cobble and boulder until reaching Lake Champlain. To a large degree the whole of the Ausable watershed is still in recovery from this mass denuding. In 2023 the region marked the 100th anniversary of the very last log float down the East Branch.

But it wasn't just the underwater part of the river that was affected during the region's industrial period. What suffered perhaps even more was the zone of transitional land between bank and upslope known in ecological parlance as the "riparian." Like the rest of the forestland that sheltered the Ausable watershed, the riparian zones were logged too, and with the added velocity of the scoured river, they started to melt away. In a pristine ecosystem, riparians are complex, interwoven networks of highly diverse vegetation. Their above-ground complexity is matched by a web of roots that holds riverbanks in place and sequesters excess water in times of flood. In drought periods riparian communities hoard moisture and help plants and animals make the bridge to the next rainy period. As a riparian matures through generations of forest succession, a leafy canopy establishes itself, further locking in banks and providing shade cover, helping cold-water fish like native brook trout survive in hot, high summer.

A secure and healthy river should have a wending, riffling riverbed accompanied by a rich, diverse riparian.

By 2011 much of the Ausable River had neither.

**"I'M OLD, SO I'M GONNA** butt-scoot," Tucker said as she inched her way down to the stretch of the Ausable known as the "Dream Mile" because of its plentiful trout. The process of fixing the Ausable has been a slow one that's involved a good deal of testing and tabulating. It's for this reason Tucker often refers to the river as the Ausable Freshwater Center's "laboratory." What works theoretically on paper has to be fine-tuned on a living river that's in the habit of laying waste to the best laid plans.

Here at the Dream Mile, where the local landowner had requested one of the Center's free assessments back in 2016, things seem to be holding.

"Where you're standing right now, before we put all this in, the water would be two feet over your head," Tucker said, taking in the view with satisfaction. Looking out over what is such productive trout water that its fishing rights are leased by Wilmington's Hungry Trout Resort, I could see the fruits of the Center's labor. A continuous constructed "bench" of bank runs 1,200 feet up the river, marking a human-secured graduation from streamside to upslope. Unseen is an underlaying netting of coconut coir the Center put down to hold the new shoulder in place while young seedlings take hold. The Center's Kiana French noted the vegetation that seemed, so far, to be doing its job.

"Look, here's a willow," French said. "That one made it." In fact quite a bit was making it along the bank as a thick, brushy understory of grasses and young shrubs had taken what was hopefully permanent residence in the newly stabilized bank. The change to the banks on the Dream Mile were matched by structural changes the Center had made in the river itself.

"Those boulders there, those are all ours," Tucker said, indicating carefully calibrated points where rocks had been laid down to slow, bend and diversify the river's current. These were not pell-mell insertions. Each spot along the Dream Mile had been gauged beforehand and a new gradient for the section had been established. The changes to both bank and riverbed are measured to the nearest tenth of a foot. A miscalculation could result in water going in the wrong direction. Now, though, Tucker wrinkled her nose at one spot where she felt the rock structure was "unnaturally straight," but she seemed pleased with the work. And even though the Center's mission is clearly linked to climate change, Tucker has found it's best to present the work as "flood-relief." She's quick to point out what they've done to improve the human/river interface.

"The road here was getting undercut and starting to fail. Now it's stabilized."

Sure, I thought. But there's a lot of road out there.

**OF ALL THE THINGS** humans got wrong about river management over the centuries, perhaps one of the hardest to make right is the impact of roads. That impact is everywhere. Next time you're on Google Maps, zoom into the major rivers of the Adirondacks and follow the water courses within the Blue Line; whether it's the Upper Hudson or the Raquette, the Oswegatchie or the Black, the Saranac, Sacandaga or Schroon, all of them, for large portions of their routes, find themselves in a forced marriage with a road. Early roadbuilders followed the path of least effort when they extracted timber and ore from the Adirondacks' interior; places with the least amount of slope and pitch. Where do you find that? Smack dab in the riparian zone.

"Roads are why we're never going to restore the Ausable to its pristine state," Tucker said. "The roads aren't going anywhere. So we have to figure out how to work with them."

Part of the problem with roads is the way they interrupt the natural floodplain, inserting into what was the natural flow of water between high elevations and streambed an impermeable slab that has no capacity to absorb floodwaters. Wherever they can, the Center's projects work to maximize the potential of remaining riparian buffer and reestablish some of the absorptive quality. But there is another aspect to the unhappy union of roadbed and streambed that Tucker showed me, where the Land of Makebelieve once stood.

"People are always telling me to stop talking about culverts," Tucker said as she made her way down to another bank while whacking away a hedge of invasive crown vetch. "But I think culverts are the sexiest thing around."

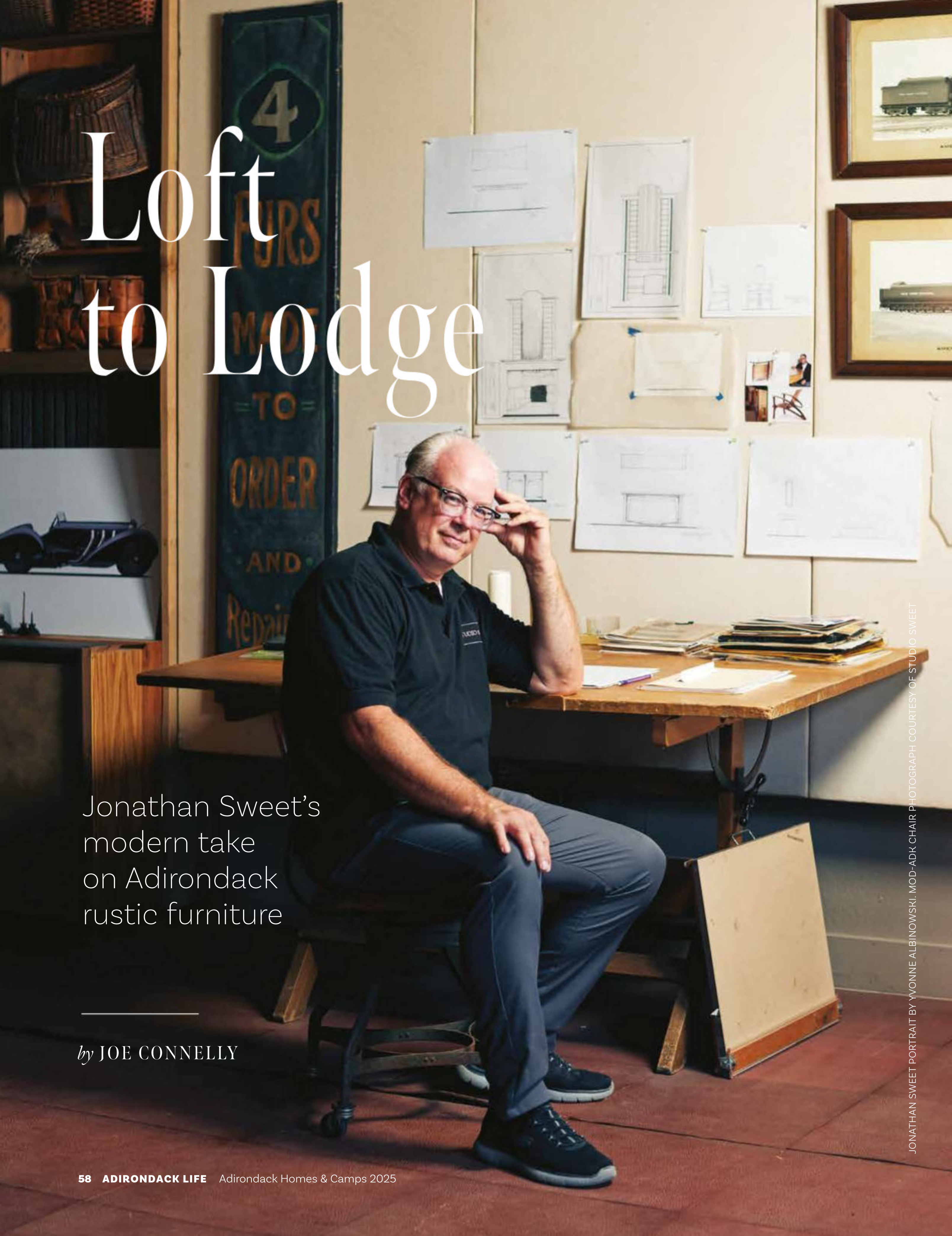
Take your car for a 20-minute drive on any country lane in the Adirondacks. Inevitably you'll cross a handful of brooks, streams and draws. Yet somehow the wheels of your car will stay dry. That's because all the waterways along your journey have been routed through buried tubes called culverts. Like roads, culverts are everywhere. Most culverts in the Adirondacks were built in haste—corrugated steel pipes thrown down in ditches with gravel and dirt piled on top.

I'd always known that culverts were usually too narrow for flood periods, and that their bare metal bottoms often created a barrier to fish nearly as impassable as a dam. But I never understood how that could be different until I saw one of the Center's sexy culverts. Instead of an ugly jutting pipe, the gracefully arched half oval below Otis Brook looked like an inviting tunnel of ecological love. Instead of a raw, life-hostile metal base, the designers had created a bed lined with spawning gravel. Riparian vegetation wrapped the tunnel in a maze of greenery that gave the structure a made-by-nature quality.

"When there's a storm," Tucker said, "the highway department never checks our crossings because they know ours will be fine." Most culverts are just a couple of feet wide and blow out every few years when water gets high. Meanwhile, Tucker's culverts can be up to 20 feet wide and good for three quarters of a century.

| *Continued on page 70*

> The Center has begun the long, slow process of establishing a kind of riparian maternity ward with enough acreage, water and sunlight to grow up to 600,000 plants per year by 2030.



# Loft to Lodge

Jonathan Sweet's modern take on Adirondack rustic furniture

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*by* JOE CONNELLY

JONATHAN SWEET PORTRAIT BY YVONNE ALBINOWSKI. MOD-ADK CHAIR PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STUDIO SWEET

E

**ENTER THE GROUNDBREAKING** art exhibit at Adirondack Experience, called Artists and Inspiration in the Wild, and the first thing that grabs you won't be a century-old oil of a mountain river at twilight, nor of a hunting party gathered around the fire: it's a pair of Adirondack chairs just right of the front door, unlike any Adirondack chairs you've ever seen before, and they tell you right away you're not in your father's museum anymore.

The first chair, by Tim Fortune, rises up out of a tree trunk and grows into a chair, one whose arms are branches, its back climbing against the wall. The other chair is the opposite, the artist sculpting the wood into form, bending its slender arms around the back to rise over the seat, held up as much by air as by the legs curving underneath. There's no question of its heritage, that deep seat and strong back can only be called Adirondack, but the MOD-ADK chair, designed and built by the artist Jonathan Sweet, strikes the old form into an idea, and from it he creates something sleek and modern and unmistakably new.

The original Adirondack chair was built to stand firm on the side of a mountain and to remain upright through a landslide. Sweet's MOD-ADK concoction looks like it's either just landed or is about to take off, a Chris-Craft of a chair, more at home in a SoHo loft than a Great Camp, but with every right to stand at the front door in Blue Mountain Lake.

Jonathan Sweet grew up on the southern fringe of the Adirondacks, in Fonda, New York. His first sense of what he might be came from working and playing on his grandmother's dairy farm, a jungle gym of tractors and abandoned machinery. He got a scholarship to the New York Institute of Technology, in Old Westbury, where he excelled at design and graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture.

There he met his wife, Tara, and after graduation they toured Europe together to see what until then were just pages in a textbook, to stare up at the Parthenon, marveling at its size and precision. Sweet got his first job with Gavosto Associates, a design-build firm in Manhattan, and began renovating SoHo lofts for Wall Streeters. Word spread about his cabinetry skills and custom lights, an architecture he made from his hands, and pretty soon he had his own business and his own place in Manhattan.

His mother, Jean Sweet, ran an interior design firm in Fonda. He was visiting her one day when he heard she was meeting a construction company executive who wanted a new look for his office in Gloversville. Sweet asked if he could trail along. He and the company owner, Tim Delaney, talked for hours that day. They were looking for the same thing, a style both Adirondack and modern.

Sweet designed every facet, the lights and the desks, the walls a mix of stone, metal and wood.

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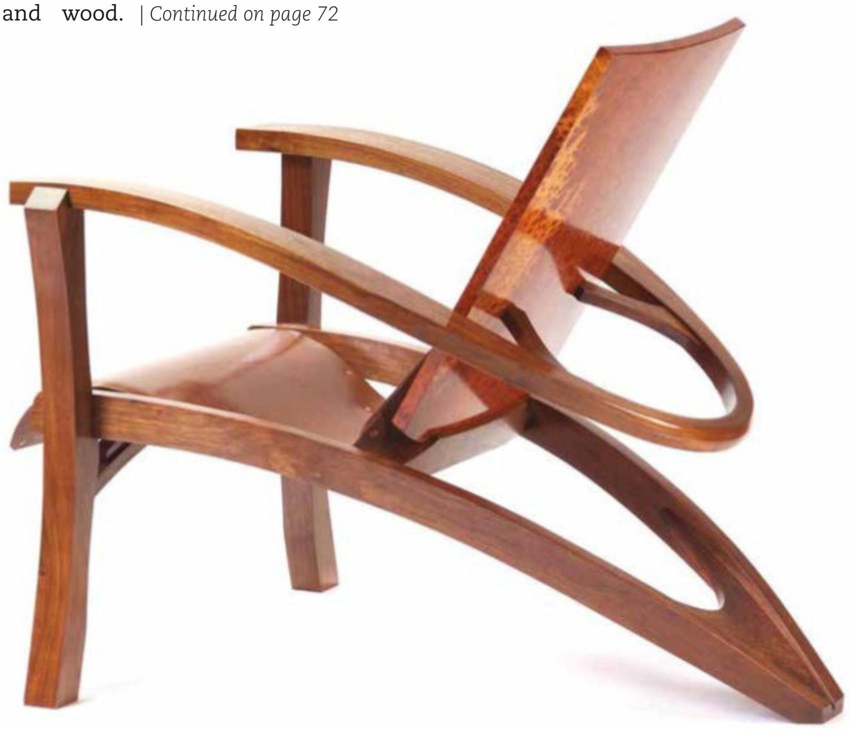
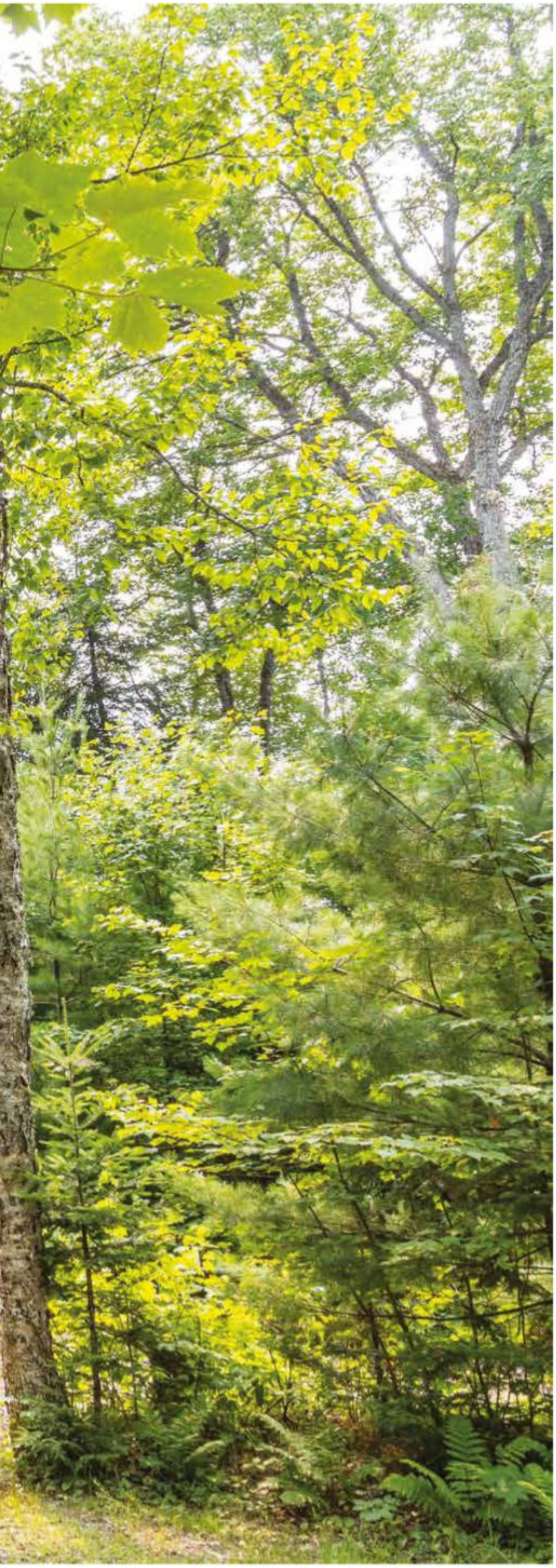


**Jonathan Sweet in his Johnstown studio. The artist's MOD-ADK chair, a contemporary twist on a regional staple, is on display at Adirondack Experience, in Blue Mountain Lake.**



# Craft Master

## Hand-building a dream camp on Rainbow Lake

*by* STEVE AMSTUTZ
*photographs by* JULIE WALMSLEY

I

**IN JULY OF 2016,** my wife, Nan, and I were invited to spend a few days with friends at a remote camp on Upper Ausable Lake in the Adirondacks. It is part of the Ausable Club, and getting there involves paddles in a guideboat and a hike over a portage.

One morning I got up early, made some coffee, took a mug down to the dock, got into a guideboat and rowed into the middle of the lake. I was surrounded by tall mountains with lovely rock faces, and I could hear the call of loons. I thought to myself, Why don't I have more time like this in my life? And then my thoughts morphed into the idea that I could find a small, rundown camp to rebuild or a small piece of property on a lake in the Adirondacks.

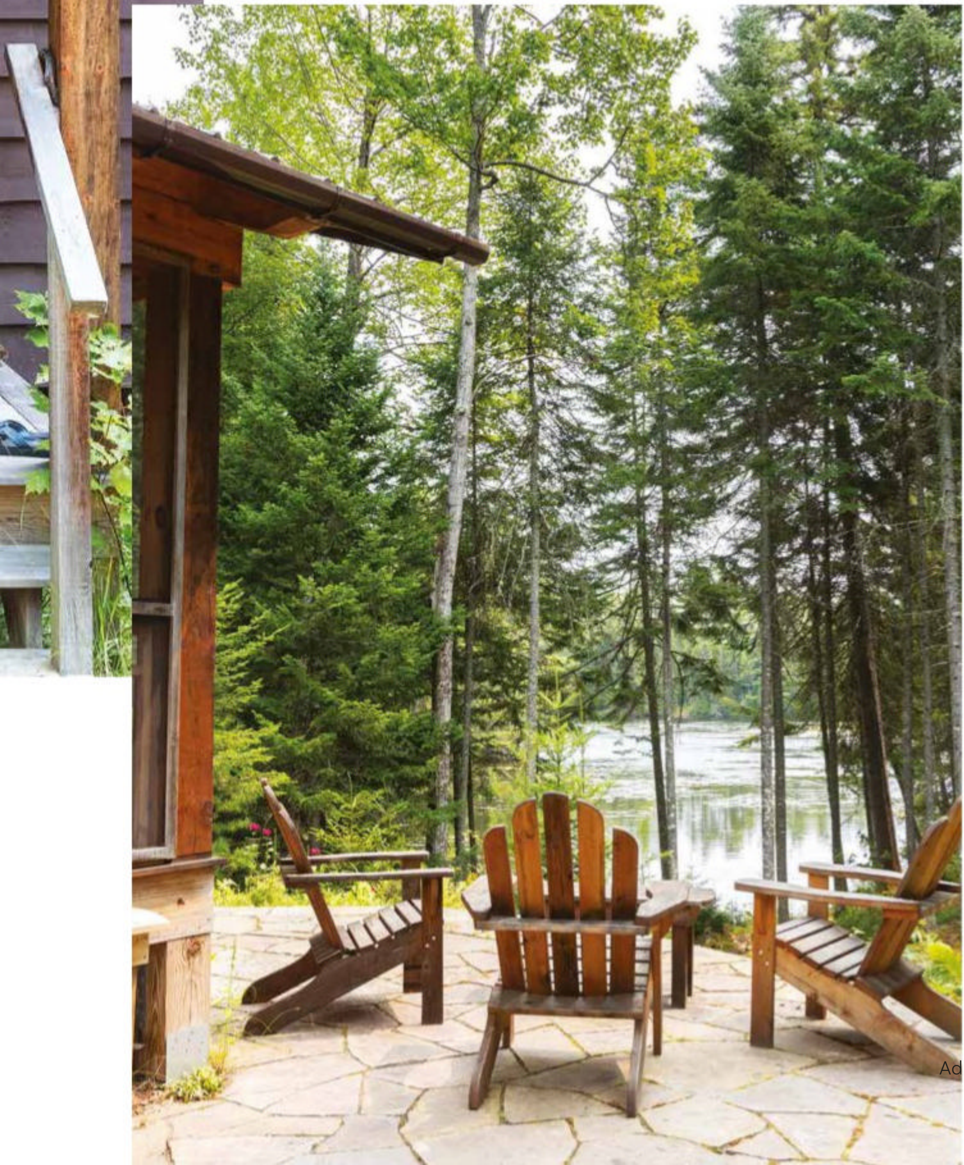
We live in Upper Jay, between the east and west branches of the Ausable River, which has diverse, mixed hardwood and conifer forest but lacks lakes. We wanted a place that accessed a lake with good canoeing options and lots of wild lands nearby.

We contacted Realtors, talked to friends, and drove roads on lakes we identified as potential. We also came to realize we did not want to buy an existing camp. We wanted to build a new place—after all, I had a 35-year career as a builder specializing in timber-frame construction.

Then, while driving a dead-end dirt road along Rainbow Lake, we spotted a rusty "for sale" sign. I was skeptical of the signage, and the phone number was hard to read. But Nan insisted we give it a call. I left a message and suspected that was the end of our inquiry. But a few days later I returned home to a message on my answering machine from a woman who told me the property was still for sale. She said, "It's yours, if you want to buy it."

The land is a one-acre, narrow strip that is 110 feet wide, resolving at the lakeshore on a small peninsula. The required building setback distance to the water's edge did not allow for building on this beautiful little peninsula, but building there would have

The one-acre lot ends at an enchanting, moss-covered peninsula.



**Steve and Nan Amstutz designed and built their 750-square-foot cabin as a snug lakeside getaway.**

been a mistake anyway, as the peninsula is enchanting and covered with lush mosses.

Nan and I envisioned a modest-sized camp on concrete piers, with a timber-framed screened porch overlooking the little bay on the north side of the peninsula. We designed a timber-frame hybrid structure, with stud-framed exterior walls and ZIP wall system sheathing that was very well insulated. We specified interior load bearing posts and beams, a timber-floor system for the loft, and a timber-roof system with well-insulated structural panels. We opted for metal roofing, brainstorm siding on the exterior walls, and board-and-batten on the gable ends. It would have seasonal water, a composting toilet, a shower and a complete kitchen, and a gray water/septic system. Electricity was available nearby. In the winter, we would haul in water in five-gallon jerry cans. (After a few years we changed out the composting toilet for a flushing unit and added a year-round well and a winterized water system.)

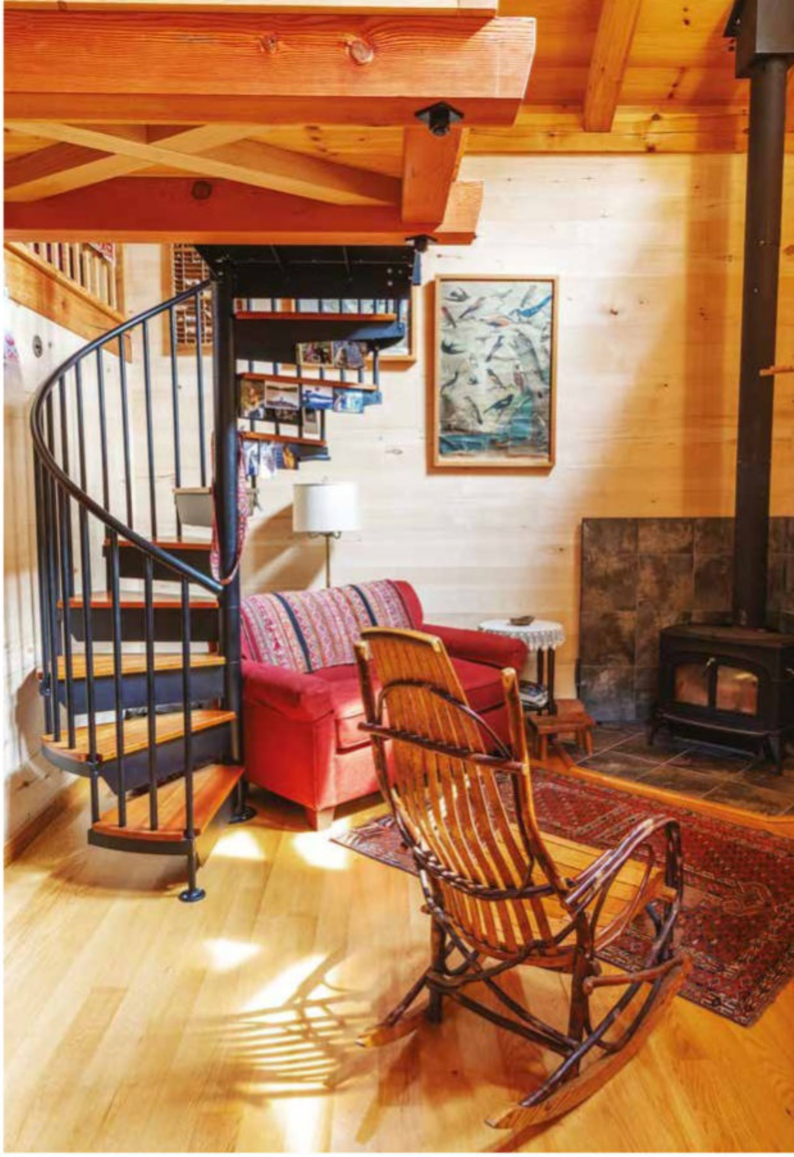
Downstairs, we planned a bedroom and a mudroom with storage cubbies modeled after preschool setups. (Nan was co-founder of Little Peaks Preschool in Keene.) A spiral staircase would lead to a second-floor loft. I had plenty of high-quality timbers and many species of lumber in storage, and we dreamed up ways to use as much of these materials as possible.

In early May 2017, I contacted a local excavator named Bob, who I had worked with before. He told me he was fighting cancer, but would do his best. So, during the height of blackfly season, we started clearing, hauling out many tandem dump-truck loads of unusable logs. I suited up in my best logging gear and sampled every possible variation of bug dope available to me, including a few old-time concoctions supplied by Bob and his wife. I still donated a lot of blood to the effort, often dripping from my neck, ears and scalp and any other body parts not sufficiently covered up. Bob sat in the comfy enclosed cab of his excavator, with the fan on full blast and waved to me with big smiles.

I had recently been approached by Jack, a young carpenter who wanted to learn timber framing. I suggested he sign on to building this camp with me, as it would be a comprehensive "start-to-finish" project. Jack took the bait.

We were an excellent team, and we had a lot of fun—Jack in his early 20s, and me at age 60. After the footers were poured and the piers were in place, we framed and insulated the deck system with the help of our daughter, Annika, and our nephew, Kent, who ventured out from Salt Lake City for a visit. We opted to build the finished red cedar deck and floor for the screened porch before the timber frame went up so that Kent could see a finished product of his labors.

We built and sheathed walls on the deck in preparation for raising day. A



friend, Paul, was building his own timber-frame home, and we decided to exchange labor—I helped raise his frame, and he did the same for ours. All of the joinery on the numerous timbers were crafted and precut in my shop in Upper Jay with the help of longtime co-worker Nancy. Our raising went off without a hitch, and it was a festive event.

Many of the timbers we used in the camp are ones that I had as leftovers from previous projects, including an eight-by-10-inch by 24-foot-long cherry beam that became the ridge. I actually designed the camp around this timber, and that is why—right or wrong—the building is 25 feet long. I used a few more leftover cherry timbers in prominent placements. The knee braces are ash, and the interior posts, floor beams and joists are all Douglas fir, much of it recycled old-growth timber, and the rafters are local white pine. All interior timbers are planed and oiled. A pair of book-matched, live-edge cherry braces adorn the east gable end. We also harvested a number of hefty large-tooth aspen on our land in Upper Jay to be used as interior paneling in the living room and loft area. It is a lively, creamy-colored lumber with dark accents. For the downstairs floors, I dropped a number of large red oaks on our land, and had the lumber kiln-dried and milled into one-by-five tongue-and-groove flooring.

Jack worked with me through Christmas, then I continued the finish work mostly by myself, often with the assistance of Nan. Trim work throughout was custom-milled in our shop, from cherry, ash and Douglas fir. I built the three interior doors out of red oak that I had harvested and air-dried for many years, in a "Z-board" and plank-style, using brass

**The steel spiral staircase, fabricated in Pennsylvania, is attached to a small balcony space. Assembling it, writes the author, "reminded me of the erector sets from my childhood, though with bigger and heavier pieces."**

Many of the timbers we used were leftover from other projects, including the 24-foot-long ridge beam.

screws, which are visible on the back sides. And my dear friend, Bill, fabricated the traditional thumb-and-bar latches in his blacksmith shop. The same air-dried oak was used for the loft handrails and balusters.

I hired a skilled plumber named Craig. I wanted to have all plumbing highly visible, done in copper and run on the interior walls. I had sheets of stainless steel fabricated into a shower stall. Craig did a fantastic job, and the shower assembly is a piece of art. He even re-plumbed an enameled antique wall sink that Nan and I scored at a salvage yard.

The metal spiral staircase was fabricated in Pennsylvania, and it arrived in pieces on a shipping pallet. Assembling it reminded me of the erector sets from my childhood, though with bigger and heavier pieces. With leftover cherry lumber I crafted nine triangular treads for the staircase, and a larger floor section to cover the steel platform landing at the loft level. It all went together pretty well, but it certainly elicited a lot of four-lettered expletives in the process. The whole spiral stair is attached to a small balcony space that hangs on one end by two custom welded steel rods from the rafters.

For the kitchen, I built cabinets with cherry doors and drawer fronts, fabricated from my leftover stockpile. Instead of crafting raised panels for the doors, I opted for simpler board-and-cross-batten doors. At one end of the living room space, the kitchen is a simple "L" shape with an "Adirondack Green" granite counter top, sourced from a quarry in Au Sable Forks, with a "leathered," less polished finish.

The cubbies and a shelf system in the mudroom were built out of air-dried oak off our land, cut many years before. I added a bench seat made out of a live-edged beech slab I had stored for years. A small pantry/closet is also in the mudroom.

When we bought the land, there was a tiny cabin with a little covered porch down near the water. It was well constructed, probably about 15 years prior, but never fully finished. At first we did not value it, but then we realized it would be a great storage building for canoes and boating accessories. I also built a fold-down platform in the cabin that

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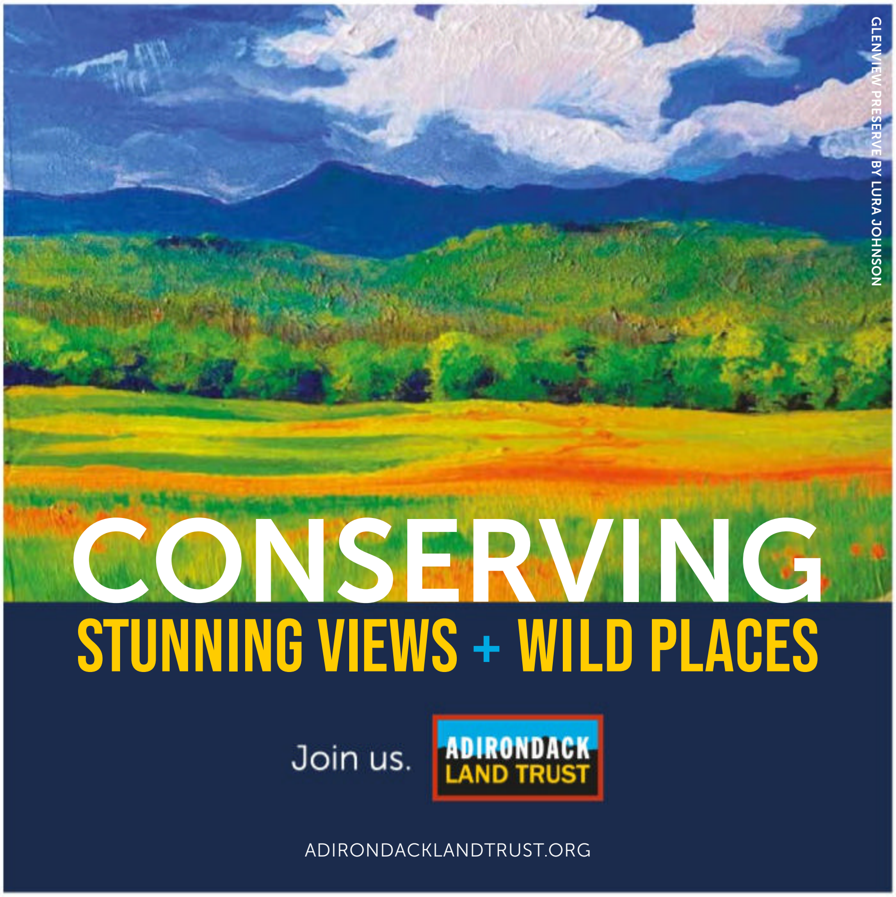

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could be used for sleeping. The porch had two round cedar logs to support the roof. I replaced one of the posts with a beaver-chewed cherry log I had harvested from a swampy area close to our home. Folks often remark on the folly of it and how, on first sighting, they think a beaver sculpted it while it was holding up the porch roof.

Sadly, Bob, my excavator, succumbed to cancer in late October 2018, after he had finished his work for me. When he delivered that last load of rocks for landscaping work in September, he paused for a social visit and tour of our little camp. He remarked that many times he never got to see the finished building projects he worked on. He was, after all, the man who was generally on site first, clearing the land and digging in the dirt.

We mostly furnished the camp with furniture we had or furniture that I built. I fashioned a number of end tables out of Spanish cedar given to me by a client. And after being in my attic for decades, I cleaned up and repaired a trunk that had been the wood box in the kitchen of my father's family farm in Ohio. It is made of oak and has a chevroned pattern of alternating strips of walnut and oak on the top lid. I always wondered who had built it. After we hauled it down from the attic, I looked it over and then turned it around. On the back, written in pencil on a very wide piece of oak, were the initials P.B.A., and the date of 1890. Peter B. Amstutz, my great-grandfather, who was a fine craftsman.

We have now spent seven enjoyable years on Rainbow Lake in all seasons. In the summer, we come and go depending on weather. We are more social up there, inviting friends to come, eat, swim, paddle or take a motorboat cruise, or even ski in the winter. Annika and her growing family have visited many times, as have our niece, Lauren, and our nephew, Kent, and their families. The camp has achieved the original goal we had set for it: to give us a strong connection to the lake country of the Adirondacks. And we enjoy sharing it with others. It has enhanced our life, and we hope it will continue to do so for many, many years to come.

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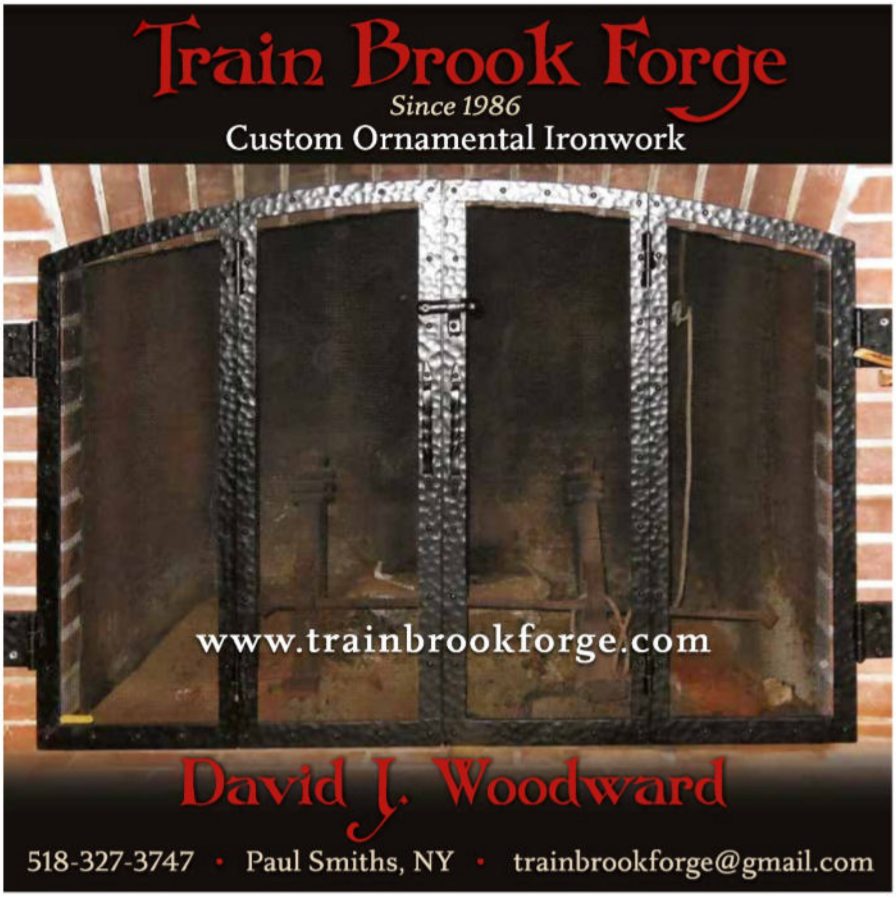

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**GROWING UP BRANDRETH**
*Continued from page 43*

jersey on The Island, but when he got there to retrieve it, all he found was a note that said, “We still have it.” We felt that his punishment—hours of wasted rowing—fit the crime.

### The Next Generation

Together, my husband Arthur Zobel and I have four girls, plus sons-in-law and granddogs. Thanksgiving is our family’s favorite time at camp. It’s when projects are abandoned, and the whole family descends on Brandreth with the anticipation of making more memories together. We play board- and card games, join other families for repurposing leftovers at a lean-to and we gather greens to make Christmas wreaths. It’s wholesome, family-bonding time that feels like an episode of *The Waltons*.

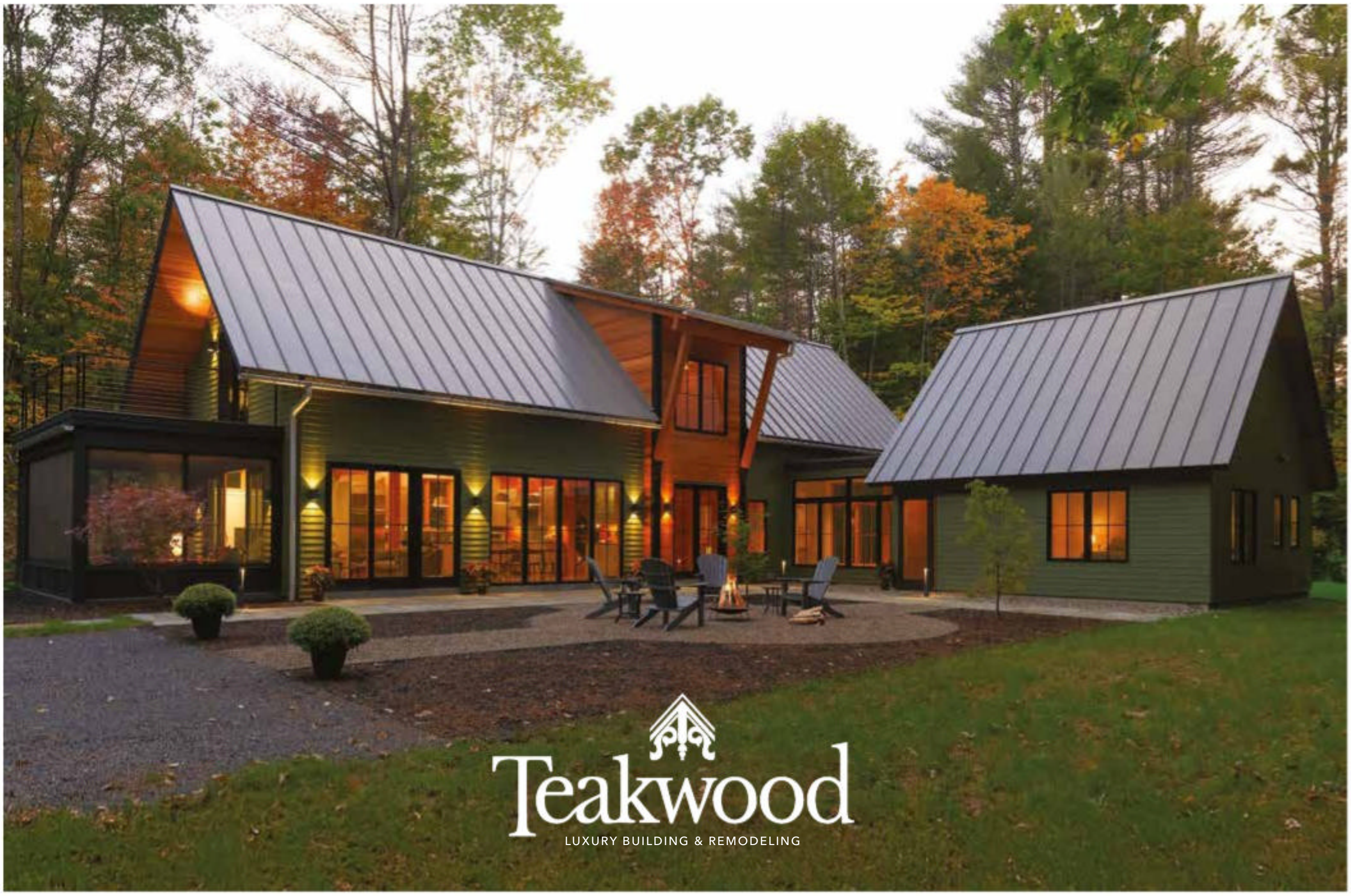
### Reflecting on History

Last year we celebrated Camp Good Enough’s 150th birthday, which led to an investigation into how the camp evolved. I studied old photographs with a magnifying glass. I re-read the earliest camp logs and wondered how the ladies dealt with hot summer days in long dresses, and how the cooks managed. I wish I could have witnessed what it was like back then—the ice harvesting, the massive gardens and the horse-drawn carriages arriving from The Station.

Sitting at the dining-room table, I continue to imagine the conversations through the generations and over the same china, including the day my great-grandmother caught a 17-and-a-half-pound lake trout. As I look out from Camp Good Enough’s front porch, I’m in awe that the view I see is exactly what my great-grandparents, Franklin and Pauline, saw on their first family trip to Brandreth Lake in 1878. I think of all the work my father did to save this camp and my mother’s dedication to this place to ensure that her children and grandchildren would always have it.

Now it’s my turn to be the caretaker.

Camp Good Enough isn’t elegant or elaborate, but it’s her simplicity and deep history that, to me, makes her as extraordinary as any Adirondack Great Camp. ▲



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David and Debbie Heidecorn established a donor advised fund with Adirondack Community Foundation to create a flexible, tax-efficient way to support the community they love. With their fund, the whole family plays a role in giving back, guided by shared values, input from community foundation staff, and a commitment to pulling together to make good things happen.

**If you’re ready to make a difference that lasts, we’re your guide.**

*Continued from page 57*

The Center has rebuilt eight culverts throughout the Ausable's drainage and advised on another dozen. Hundreds still need to be upgraded. It's the sheer scale of it that led the Center to what may be its most ambitious project of all.

**JUST BECAUSE YOU** know you're right doesn't necessarily mean you have the wherewithal to fix what's wrong. And here is where the willow meets the road in accomplishing the Center's mission of helping the Ausable and the Adirondacks' other major rivers become more natural and, ultimately, safer for their human neighbors. You can build endless bankfull benches—sloped areas that slow water—lay down all the coconut coir you can drag out of the world's tropics, and retrofit every culvert from here to the Canadian border, but if what you plant in those riparians keels over and dies during the next flood or freeze, everything you've done will be flushed down the rivers, ending up at the bottom of Champlain's eponymous lake.

Through testing at their seven active restoration sites, Tucker and her plant advisor Kiana French and biodiversity research manager Carrianne Pershyn came to realize that native plants, collected from seed locally and propagated to seedling age, fare better than even the same species grown in a nursery outside the region. The problem? There are no large-scale nurseries in the Adirondacks that grow native plants. Which was why the Ausable Freshwater Center's Kiana French is stationed away from the river—near John Brown's farm in Lake Placid—where a meadow stretches on and on.

"This was the potato testing ground for Cornell's Agricultural Extension," French told me as she, in an almost Julie Andrews *Sound of Music*–like gesture, spread her arms wide at the amazement of having so much good ground at her disposal. At above 2,000 feet of elevation, the Uihlein Farm, as it's sometimes called—donated in the 1960s by Henry and Mid Uihlein—encompasses more than 300 unusually pancake-flat acres, shielded from the wind by the Great Range and blessed with clear High Peaks sunshine. Thanks to a $651,000 grant from the Lake Champlain Basin Program, the Center leases the land and has begun the long, slow process of establishing a kind of riparian maternity ward with enough acreage, water and sunlight to grow up to 600,000 young plants per year by 2030.

French, who previously worked at Vermont's Intervale incubator for small-scale farmers, welcomes the change and the challenge. "I got a little burned out on farmers' markets and all that," she said, "but I still love farming. And this is a chance to do it in a new way."

Part of the process resembles actual farming. This portion of the Uihlein Farm, where Cornell potatoes once grew in a tuber-topia of testing, is now cover crop that for the next two years will gradually break up the compacted soil. Eventually all that land will be used for growing out the future riparians of mul-

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tiple rivers in the region. But the part of the property that really makes French's hazel eyes flash are the two new greenhouses where her collected progeny are making a start in life.

"In the fridge at my house there used to be no room for food—it was all seeds," she said. Now every time the wild willows, cottonwoods, oaks and maples of the nearby forests start casting down their fluff puffs, helicopters and acorns, French can gather and quickly sow them in tubes that will be protected through winter. Some of the species require a "double dormancy" and up to two years of incubation to get tricked into growing in captivity. But the prospect that what they're doing could reestablish riparians and also potentially make a self-sustaining business that serves the region is particularly exciting.

"We're trying to figure out the pricing and scale," French said as she pointed out how her shelves of red oak seedlings retain their acorns for up to a year as a "snack pack" while they grow through lean times. In effect, the Center has a kind of snack pack in the form of a federal grant—an initial subsidy to establish the nursery. The demand for native seed and plants is on a regional level but also exists nationwide. Without enough native plants, landowners often turn to nonnative species that can, in turn, propagate in the wild and further displace native plants. This has ill effects for the economy and the river. Invasive species quite often are "opportunistic," have shallow roots and don't do the kind of bank-holding stabilization that a truly native riparian can accomplish down the line.

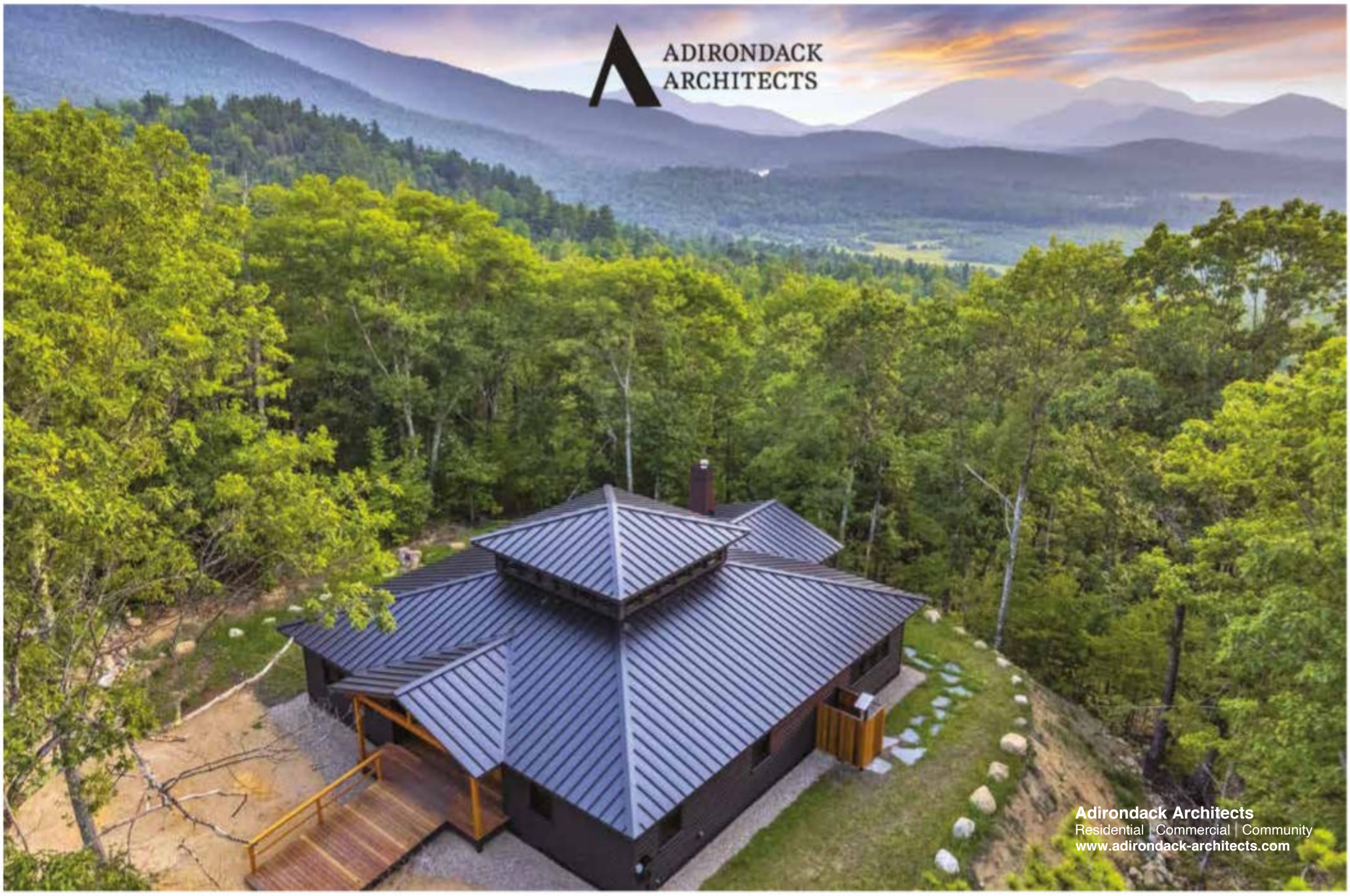
The idea, then, is to build a business where small and large landowners across the Adirondacks can purchase the Ausable Freshwater Center's seedlings and saplings in a potentially virtuous cycle. The Center can also buy what it grows, using the plants in more restoration projects along more rivers.

How much river will Kelley Tucker, Kiana French and the rest of the Center's team be able to restore in the years to come? It's anybody's guess. French is contemplating going to business school to improve her commercial chops in helping that virtuous cycle grow wider and wider.

Adirondackers can do their part, too. Those with property abutting a river, brook or stream can call the Center thanks to Stream Wise, an initiative that provides free assessments, recommendations and assistance to create stream buffers. The work could cost you a lot, or maybe just a little bit of elbow grease. You just don't know until you confront the problem. Rivers are mysterious.

**Learn more about Ausable Freshwater Center and its work at www.ausableriver.org.**

**Paul Greenberg is the bestselling author of *Four Fish* and writer-in-residence at the Safina Center. This article includes additional reporting from New York University Animal Studies students Allie Abramson and Travis Phulnauth through a grant from the Walton Family Foundation.**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## LOFT TO LODGE

*Continued from page 59*

As Delaney's business expanded so did the building, and with it the ideas that went inside. "I was watching a bulldozer outside the office," Sweet says, "scraping away these thin layers of shale, rolling them along the blade. I took the stone and pressed it flat and with a coat of lacquer it looks like bark." Sweet's shale walls were braced with the beams of an old barn that was due to be demolished to make way for a Target.

When Delaney began building wind turbines, Sweet styled the new wing of his office to look like an airplane hangar. "We let him run with it," Tim Delaney says. "The cost was probably three times the average, but we wanted to do something special for our workers, like they were working in an Adirondack lodge."

"He wanted the room where they met and talked and ate to also be a space that could inspire them to create," says Sweet.

In 2007 Delaney's company was bought by a global conglomerate, Tetra Tech. Seven years later the company reorganized, the building eventually purchased by the ARC Lexington, becoming the Paul Nigra Center for the Arts. The office entry Sweet designed looks right at home as the entrance for a major arts center. The meeting room for workers is now a venue for concerts and conferences and kids' birthday parties, the airplane hangar an art space where people with disabilities can learn and create.

Sweet started the project in 2000 and became so involved, he and Tara left Manhattan for Johnstown, their new home a short trip downriver from where he grew up. He bought an old building on North Perry, and turned the top floor into a loft. "I'm used to living in a city," he says, "and I thought, Why can't we have that here?"

Eventually he bought an empty building across the street, and set up shop on the first floor.

At any time in the old mill town building on North Perry, as many as 10 employees might be busy cutting and shaping wood. When I visited in July, five of them were working on a locker-room install for the University of New Hampshire. (Sweet estimates he's done these installs for more than a hundred colleges.) That day the other half of his workforce was in Saratoga, on deadline to complete the interiors of Prime Group's office headquarters. Sweet got that job, he says, by designing a garage to house the owner's Ferraris.

In the corner of the mill, Sweet works on his own pieces. He's making what looks like a side table, with three elliptical cabinets underneath, each separated from the other, and from the top and legs, so that at first glance it's not immediately clear how they all hold together. He can talk all day about the Golden Mean and the Fibonacci Sequence, about positive and negative spaces and the way light and shadow interplay. Look at a tree, he says, and imagine how much of that mass is of the wood and how much more is the air in between.

After a tour of the mill, he leads me upstairs to another world. The second floor is open and airy and quietly lit from the floor-length windows. Sweet's works are spread out across the space, making it look more like a Manhattan gallery than a Mohawk Valley mill. The latest edition of his MOD-ADK is here, as well as a plywood version he says he built one night after watching the movie *Ford v Ferrari*. There's a table that models a river's eddy and a lamp as tall as a tree.

The gallery features other local artists: a painting by Paul Lakata, who also lives in Johnstown, and sculptures by John Van Alstine, whose studio is in nearby Wells. In the building next door, Sweet rents out studio space to the artist Tyler Schrader. Up the road, next to the Paul Nigra Arts Center, is artist Barney Bellinger's metal menagerie. Together and with others, they've turned Johnstown into a serious art hot spot.

Sweet calls his style Loft to Lodge and you can see why, a journey from the canyons of Manhattan to the foothills of the Adirondack Park, with a bit of the Parthenon he marveled at 30 years before. Work that's at once stylized and contemporary, and where you can still see the forest for the trees. ▲

**See more of Jonathan Sweet's work at www.jonathansweet.com.**

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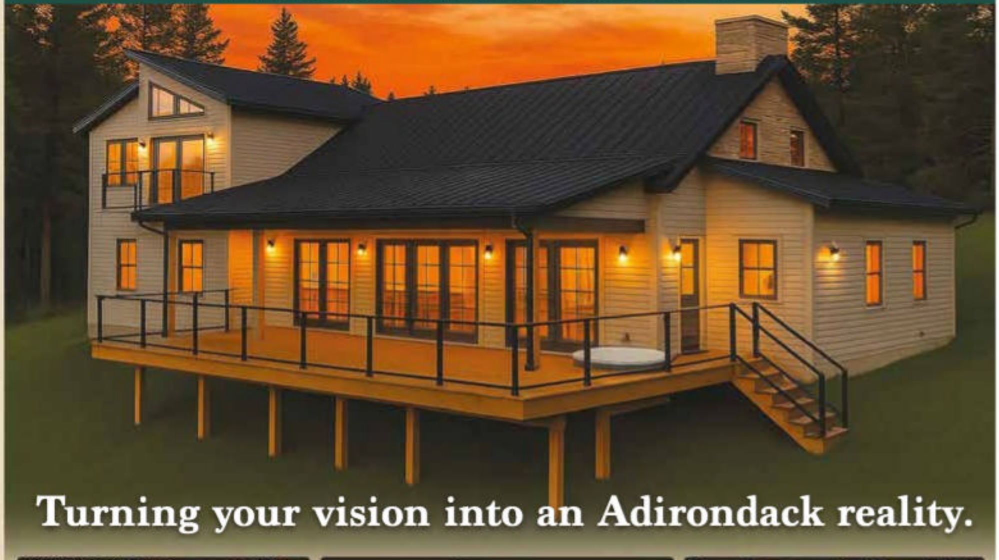

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# Baby Blue Line

## The challenges of starting a family in one of the best places to raise a child

### BY SAWYER BAILEY

Fewer than 400 babies are born to Essex County families annually. This year my son was one of them. I learned I was pregnant in June. The sun was up before five, but I was up earlier. I had been waiting to take the test. The blue line was so faint, just barely there. I woke my husband, Adam, and we stared into each others' eyes.

A spot in an Adirondack day care facility is a precious find. For every six children in the Adirondacks, there is just one slot. Securing ours was among the first priorities. The day care staff we met asked how old our child was. Adam and I looked at each other bashfully and I placed my hands on my not-yet-round stomach.

“Wow,” our doctor remarked, “you’re coming all the way from Elizabethtown?” Since 1953 the community hospital down the road from our house has not delivered babies. To be fair, rural hospitals don’t rake it in with obstetrics, and when the births get less frequent, the health outcomes get poorer. For excellent prenatal care, we had to go to Plattsburgh, Saranac Lake or Middlebury, Vermont. I did not want to add a state crossing to the trek, so we chose Saranac Lake’s Adirondack Medical Center. At my first appointment, my eyes traveled across a wall of birth announcement cards. Yawning newborns with bows, wrapped in delicate blankets, or held in a sibling’s arms. I couldn’t believe we would have a birth to announce—that this uncertainty would end in a baby. But I hoped it would.

**The author and her son on Giant Overlook, near Elizabethtown.**

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ADAM BAILEY

I lead a local nonprofit and the days are long and rewarding. But weathering the first trimester with all the usual helpings of nausea, fatigue and taste aversion left me wilted. In the middle of the night I had to munch on crackers from my bedside drawer to keep from throwing up. When driving to Old Forge for an evening meeting, I packed a sleeping bag and pillow. I took a catnap in the Long Lake Stewart’s parking lot. The temperature outside read 88 degrees. I sipped my Gatorade and melted into my seat.

I started to show, and the seasons began to change. We decided to renovate our kitchen. I tried another Hail Mary attempt to train our wild Australian shepherd. My skin never looked better. I never slept worse.

When I went into the outpatient lab around the holidays, the room was decorated in paper snowflakes. Bloodwork order slips, syringes and vials adorned a white Christmas tree. I was there for my glucose test, the rite of passage to determine if I’d acquired gestational diabetes. I thought about all the Christmas cookies I had eaten. I grabbed a bottle of what tasted like flat orange Tang and was told to drink it in less than 10 minutes. “If you throw up,” the nurse said apologetically, “you have to drink it again.

A friend recommended having a doula at our birth, a dedicated labor companion. In Vermont, swing a cat and you’ll hit a doula. In the Adirondacks, all the cats hit are defunct doula webpages—women no longer practicing or busy taking care of babies of their own. I finally found someone through a friend. Her name was Brittany. We met and connected instantly, her presence both enthusiastic and calming.

The first thing I did each morning was hike at the Blueberry Hill preserve, in Elizabethtown. I wore an enormous pair of brown sweatpants and a big purple coat I bought at the Keeseville Methodist Thrift Shop. The two older women running the shop bickered about whether I was having a boy or a girl. “She’s carrying low,” the first proclaimed. “But her hiney is so small!” the other rebutted.

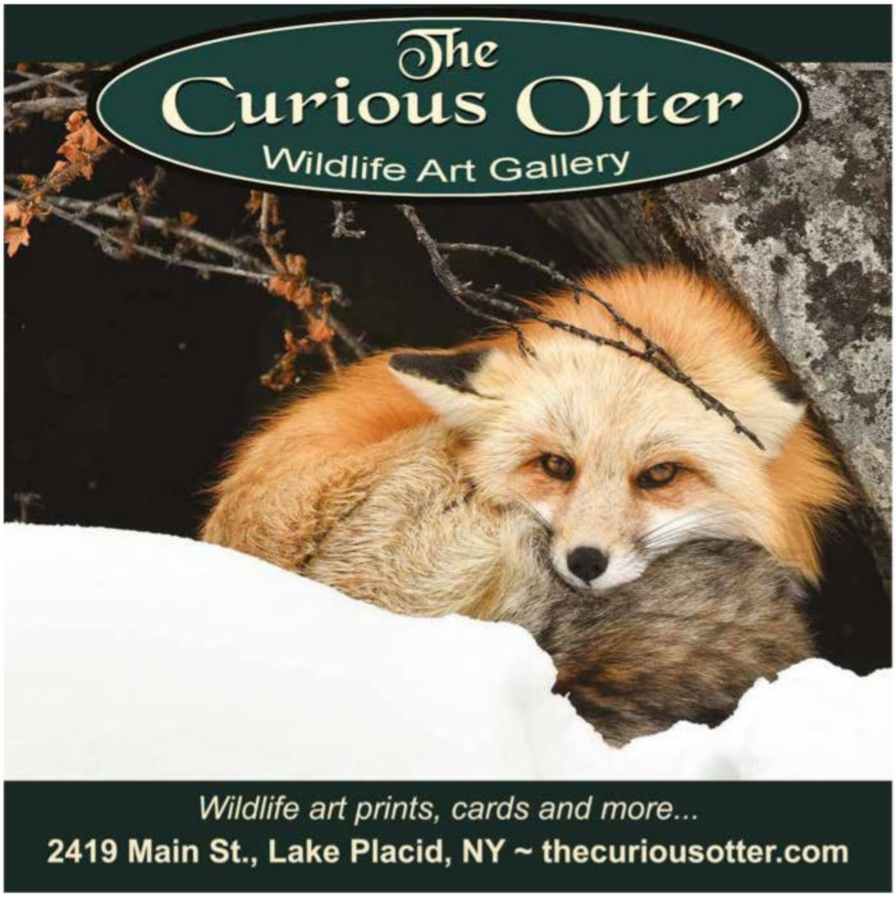
I’d begun to think it might just be a beach ball in there, and not a boy or a girl after all.

The baby was breech at 32 weeks. An ultrasound revealed their little feet up by their head and hands, as if ready to cannonball out. I was told to put my body in a variety of inversions and contortions, and to go swimming. It was January in the Adirondacks. The aquatic options were slim. Finally, I used a friend’s guest pass at the Adirondack Health pool 35 minutes away in Lake Placid. I am a terrible swimmer. Mostly I just bobbed around. My belly stuck out like a buoy above the water as I floated.

The baby flipped. I started wearing the same oversized knit sweater to work every day. The kitchen was finally coming together. No more washing dishes in the bathroom sink.

“If you go into labor today it will be a miracle,” the doctor told us at my 40-week appointment. “You’re not showing any signs.” The next morning I woke up with contractions. I made pancakes and spent the day on the couch counting the minutes between pain. Snow kicked up by nightfall. We drove to the hospital in a whiteout through Cascade Pass.

The next morning it was -29 degrees with windchill. It was the day of the Colby Classic Ice Fishing Derby, and dozens of ice shanties flecked the frozen snow. We could see them from the delivery room window. My labor had progressed throughout the night, but dilation didn’t. The birth plan went out the



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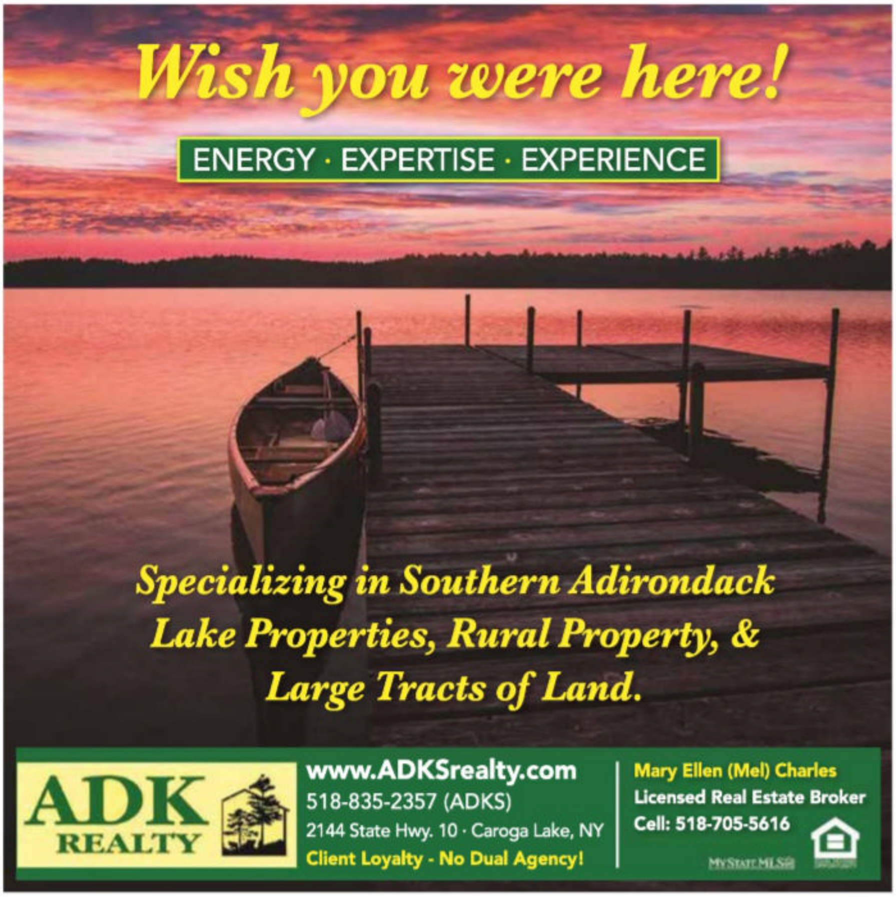
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window, pitocin and an epidural went in. Our baby boy was born as school was letting out. I loved him the moment I saw him, and before that, when he was inside me, and before that. The winter sun blazed through the window, and our baby lay on our chests. "Name!?!!!?" grandparents texted us. We didn't reply. Hours later, we named him in the darkness of the hospital room, our adrenaline still pulsing. Logan, after my father.

The snow was piled high at home. Our sidewalk was caked in ice. After walking upstairs and feeling the chill of three days with the heat turned low, I told Adam we should just sleep on the couch downstairs. He lugged the bassinet down, and there we stayed for over a week. The glow of the woodstove illuminated the bassinet mesh. Adam slept on one leg of the sectional, and I slept on the other, his feet sometimes touching my head. We recorded every time Logan ate and for how long, when he pooped and peed, when he slept. When we slept, was not enough.

We were not the seasoned parents of third or fourth children who sauntered from the hospital to the grocery store or school play. We were here for the first time, everything felt perilous. I felt as if I were a passenger in a car traveling one hundred miles an hour, with no one at the wheel. I cried easily, I couldn't look anyone in the eye. I lived inside each moment so entirely, because I wasn't ready for the next one to come.

A friend set up a dinner delivery schedule for us, and for the next six weeks we did not cook. Family visited and tended to our chickens, folded our laundry, and made emergency trips to Target in Plattsburgh for the tiny newborn clothes everyone told us we surely wouldn't need. I held up the blue three-month onesie a family friend had given us. It had sea creatures on it, little turtles and crabs. "He will never fit in this."

We bumped the stroller over the ruts of the ruined sidewalk along our street. It felt more like off-roading. It always put Logan to sleep back then, his eyes almost entirely covered by the hats the nurses told us he should always wear. I was angry the concrete was so forgot-

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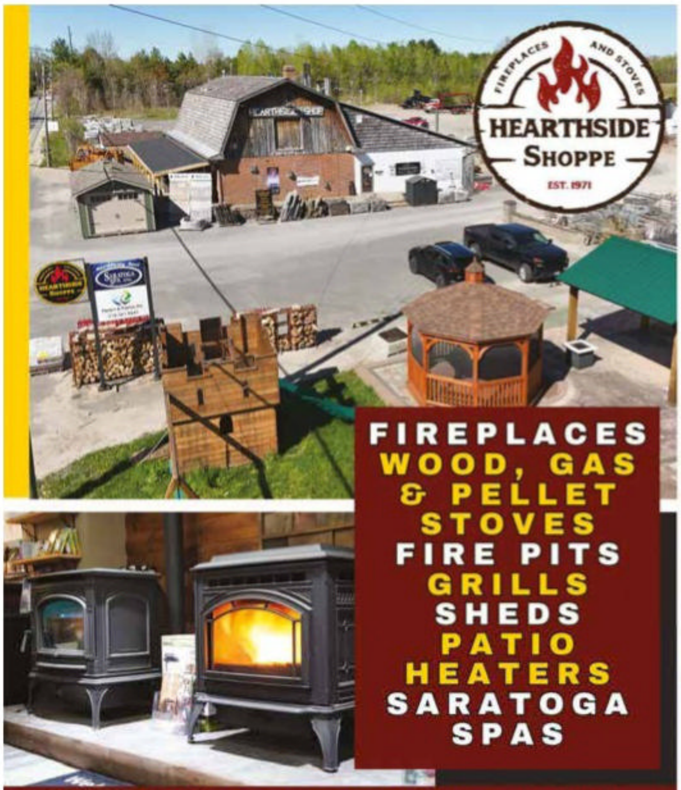

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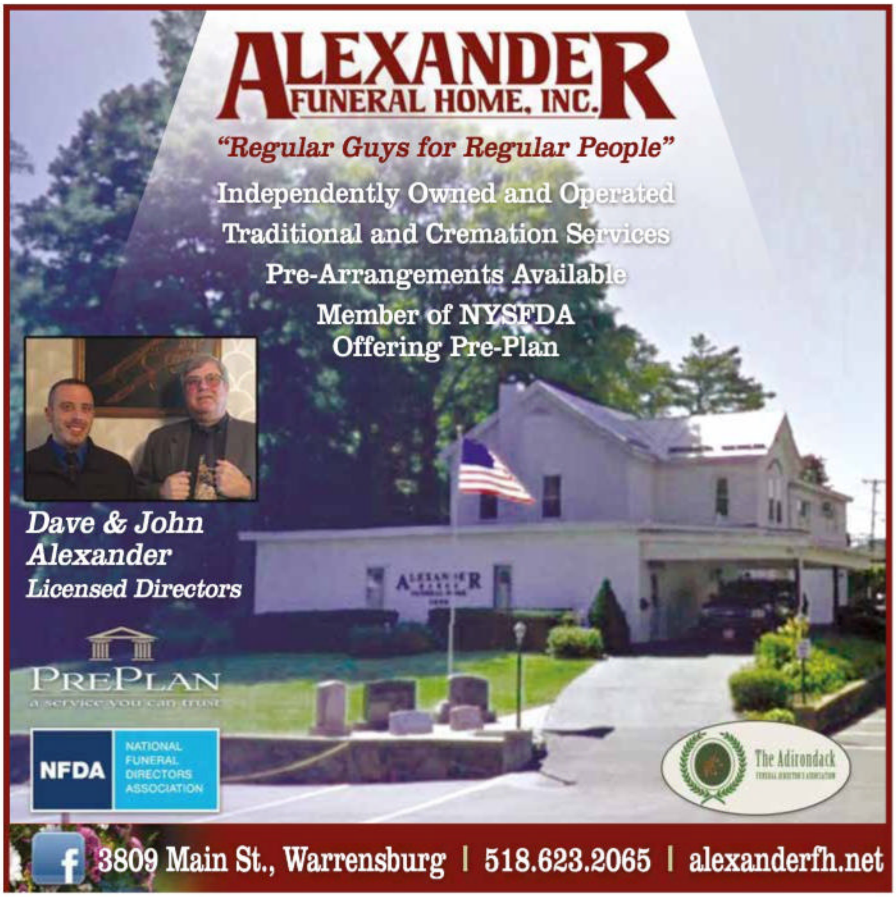
ten, feeling cheated of the miles of sidewalk my city friends had access to, feeling stuck and scared about keeping this tender being thriving in a chaotic world.

Eventually, we folded one layer of life back in, then another, and another. First, the upstairs bedroom, then dog walks, then our jobs. We rocked him to sleep with white noise 45 times a day until his eyes slowly closed (and sometimes popped back open). We gave him his first bath, wrapped him in a warm towel, took too many pictures. "Enjoy this," Adam's dad said, "before it all becomes routine."

Our chickens started laying again, the coltsfoot came up in the yard, and The Branch behind our house flushed with meltwater, the original white noise. Logan started giving his first smiles, then his first coos. When I would sing, he would chirp along with me, giggling in little tiny gasps. We began to be able to distinguish a hungry cry from a discomfort cry, from a cry of boredom.

We took a hike to Giant Overlook on Mother's Day. "I don't feel anything bad," I told Adam, staring out at the vast expanse of wilderness, Logan on my chest in the carrier—the stroller ditched a long time ago. That afternoon Logan fell asleep on me for hours. I knew I should cherish the moment, because soon enough it would be gone, and I would hold the image in my mind like a pebble in a palm, remembering and remembering.

Now Logan has outgrown his three-month clothes, his legs kicking to the bottom of his footie pajamas. He puts himself to sleep. He likes to keep his eyes wide open when we walk, curious to see the world. I think about how we will spend long weekends hiking the Northville-Placid Trail, how he may be able to walk to school, how he will know the farmer who grew his food. I hope he will take joy and great peace in the place his parents chose to raise him, and believe that this vast expanse of small towns and wild nature is his to love. Showing my son this world is the biggest delight of my life. He will discover everything, and we will be there, discovering him too.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# Local Talent

## A Saranac Lake architect's hometown footprint

### BY TONY HALL

Jesse Schwartzberg, the founder of Saranac Lake–based Black Mountain Architecture, wanted to practice architecture, but not just anywhere. It had to be in his hometown.

"I just missed the Adirondacks," he said, recalling the years he lived in San Francisco after graduating from UC Berkeley. "A lot of people leave places like this because they don't like the small town stuff—others knowing your business, for instance. I always took comfort from that."

It's safe to say that Schwartzberg's kinship with the Adirondacks makes him a better—or at least a different—architect than he would have been otherwise.

"It was always my intention to come back here to prac-

**Jesse Schwartzberg came back to make a difference, at the drafting table and in the community.**

2
SCHWARTZBERG

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA

tice. I know the topography, I know the logistics of the permitting process. I have an opportunity to use my experience to work on projects that are specific to this particular place and which have the potential to improve the lives of people here," he said. "I can have a much bigger influence here than I could anywhere else."

Schwartzberg's office, a stylish take on the traditions of Main Street architecture, is within walking distance of the buildings that housed his father's medical practice and his mother's law offices. His children now wander into his office after school, evoking his own childhood. When Jesse and his wife, Kim, attend parent-teacher conferences, they reach the classroom through the same hallways he roamed as a fourth-grader. His two brothers and their families also live and work nearby.

"We all ski, and every weekend, we'll see each other at Whiteface's mid-station, kids included, all junior racers," said Schwartzberg. "And every Friday, my brothers and I meet for coffee. It's on our Google calendars."

Jesse was four, and his brothers not yet born, when their father, Dr. Josh Schwartzberg, joined Dr. Frank Trudeau as a partner at Saranac Lake's Medical Associates and the family moved to Saranac Lake.

A nationally ranked Alpine racer, Jesse attended Lake Placid's Northwood School, graduated from Germantown Friends Academy, in Pennsylvania, and was admitted to Berkeley, where he majored in earth science and forestry. Back in the Adirondacks, he collected water samples for the Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation and persuaded a family friend to hire him as a carpenter, starting as a sweeper-upper.

On the surface, those years may have seemed aimless, if not wasted, especially to his family, who saw him as a high achiever. He views them differently. He was finding his way, however obliquely. Plus, he was having fun. He also discovered that carpentry requires a perspective that sees how superficially discrete elements relate to one another. As architecture itself does. The one thing led

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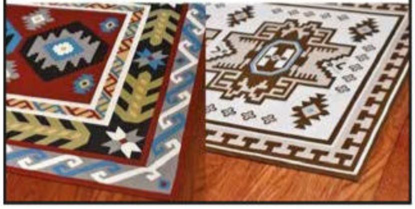

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him to the other.

Schwartzberg opened Black Mountain Architecture in 2011, after earning his master's degree from the School of Architecture and Environment at the University of Oregon in Eugene. The practice allows him to think and design across a spectrum of scale—from contemporary homes on Kiwassa Lake to Saranac Lake's civic center to three of the largest market-rate, net zero, multifamily complexes in the nation. Earlier this year, a developer broke ground on Schwartzberg's latest design, a $36 million, 168-unit complex in Amsterdam, New York.

The complex that Schwartzberg designed in Amsterdam does not happen to be situated in a downtown urban core, but nothing prevents similar high-performance, low-carbon buildings from being built on small lots in the hamlets of the Adirondacks or, for that matter, on the shores of places like Kiwassa Lake.

Commercial and residential buildings account for 32 percent of New York State's total greenhouse gases. If New York is to reduce its carbon emissions by 85 percent before 2050, as state law requires, every new building will have to be as energy efficient as those designed by Schwartzberg, who quantifies every project's climate impact.

In fact, Schwartzberg is on a mission to increase the number of green buildings in the Adirondacks.

"Unless everybody is working within these parameters, the state's targets are an abstraction," said Schwartzberg.

As a local, Schwartzberg and his missionary zeal carry more weight within the community than they might otherwise.

"We have a client who came to us, not because he wanted a green building, but because he knows me and he trusts me. So being enmeshed in a community helps," he said.

Schwartzberg's office building also doubles as a showcase for sustainable architecture, incorporating many of the features that he has used in commercial and single- and multi-family projects.

It was constructed with carbon-negative materials and doesn't require large amounts of carbon to be operational. And it has an envelope that is airtight.

"One of the easiest ways to make a building climate-friendly is to make it energy efficient. A well-designed and well-constructed building shouldn't need much energy, and what energy it does need should be produced as passively as possible. That's how you minimize the size of your carbon footprint," he explained.

The building is comfortable and efficient year-round, Schwartzberg added. It also exemplifies his conviction that the first rule of architecture is: if you want to help the environment, choose your building site wisely.

"This building is the perfect example of that. We're tied into municipal infrastructure; we're not creating new wells and septic systems," he said.

The greenest buildings might be those vacant or under-utilized buildings—and there are many in Adirondack hamlets that have been repurposed, said Schwartzberg.

"All that steel and concrete is embodied carbon," he said.

"Take two blighted houses on two lots, knock them down and put in a six-unit building that is within the hamlet, hooked up to the municipal infrastructure and within walking distance of work or services," he said.

For Schwartzberg, an architecture practice is not a queue of unrelated projects. His office building is a contribution to the revitalization of downtown Saranac Lake and a walkable environment. The civic center is an invitation to the residents of Saranac Lake to enter a shared gathering space. To think about design, said Schwartzberg, is necessarily to think about a problem and how to solve it.

Life in the Adirondacks affords few luxuries, but if we are lucky, there's at least this: we can choose not only how we make a living, but how we live. Jesse Schwartzberg is a case in point. ▲

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# The Beaver House

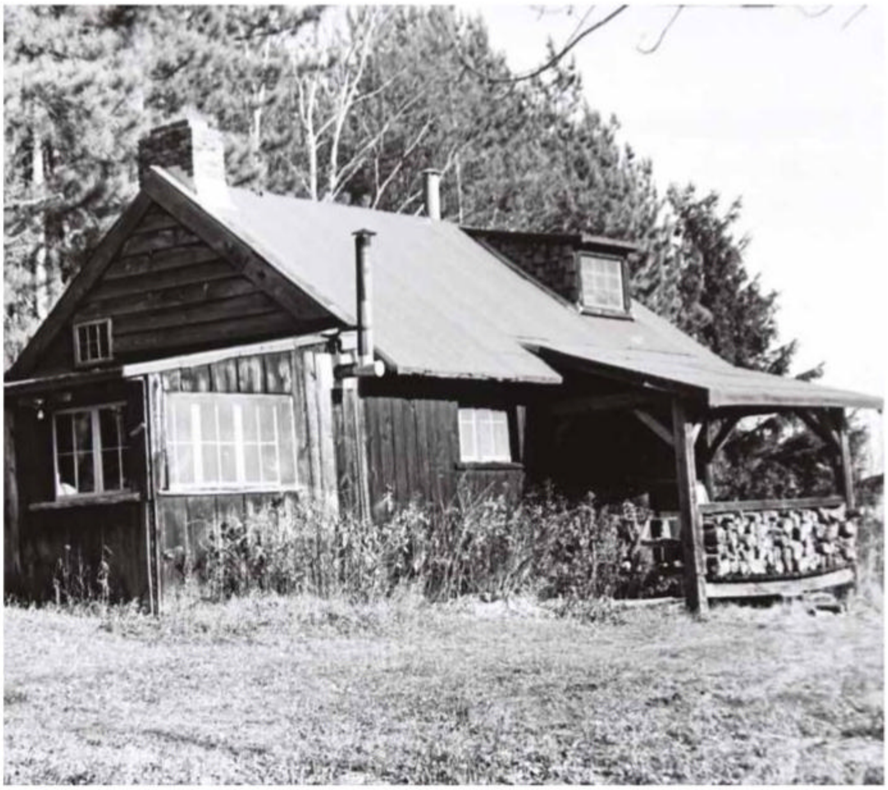
## Conservationist Paul Schaefer's beloved Bakers Mills camp

BY DAVID GIBSON

In 1933, Paul Schaefer formed a hunting club comprised of men from counties neighboring the Adirondacks that lasted for eighty years. Many of its members worked for the General Electric Company. It was named the Cataract Club for the springtime cataract of water, fed by a swamp at the top of Eleventh Mountain's wild ridgeline, which fell precipitously into the valley below. The club members focused all their hunting efforts within this area Paul came to know so well, the 114,000-acre Siamese Ponds Wilderness. Schaefer was known for his keen eye with a rifle, his long, loping gait, his great physical endurance in the woods, his tales of fighting for the protection of the wilderness, and his deep respect for its wildlife.

Many of the hunting and fishing adventures that filled Paul's soul and stirred his imagination and protective feelings for wilderness were described in his 1993 book, *Adirondack Cabin Country*. Starting with the old log cabin purchased from Johnny Morehouse by Schaefer and his brother Vincent in 1926, by 1960 Paul was building several other cabins in the same area. All were the starting point for many a wilderness adventure. Paul viewed hunting as far more than a source of venison; it was a quest for a magnificent animal to whom he owed great respect, and who frequently overmatched him in the deep woods. These hunting experiences refreshed and renewed his battle with other human beings to preserve wilderness for humanity as well as for the deer, the bear, the trout, the owl, and the beaver, and for its own intrinsic worth.

**Schaefer built the cabin in 1960 on the edge of the Siamese Ponds Wilderness, the stomping grounds of his Cataract Club hunting mates.**



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Paul built the cabin he named "Beaver House" in 1960. Hunting friend Don Hall helped Paul pick out the site, within easy walking distance between the family's camp Cragorehol and Howard and Alice Zahniser's cabin Mateskared farther uphill. Paul decided to build Beaver House to resemble his Adirondack Room at home in Niskayuna, with large, hand-hewn beams, open gable ceiling, and plank floors of pine. The beams came from an old house—"older than the hills"—on Sanders Avenue, south of Albany and about a mile from the Hudson River. The house was locally known as the "beaver house." There were empty vats in the old building. This evidence plus the sweet musty aroma emanating from these beams during sanding convinced Paul that the beams of the old house might date to the late seventeenth century and might have been impregnated with the musk of beavers processed for their furs.

Those big beams had to be transported from south of Albany to the Adirondack cabin site in northern Warren County. How did he do it? Paul told us that he would not infrequently ask hitchhikers he found along the highways and byways to sit on the old, big beams hanging off the back of his truck to act as counterweights. From time to time, he told me, he would swap favors with certain truckers, particularly those who were lost in the Adirondacks. In return for Paul's directions, the trucker carted some big beams to Paul's construction site.

One way or another, the materials for the Beaver House were assembled. Paul worked on weekends with brother Carl to construct his new Adirondack cabin. He wanted the cabin to be somewhere between a home and the "simple life we knew in wilderness tents," "for occasional overnight stays," a "gathering place for hunters on their way into the wilderness, and a place for conservationists to plan strategies for the continuing battles to retain the wild-forest character of the Adirondacks," a "refuge from the hustle and bustle of the life that I was living, a place to sit in front of the fireplace, alone or with friends, anticipating the trip on the morrow or reliving the adventures of the day."

While not a deer hunter, I was eager to learn about the Cataract Club and its members. In the fall of 1987, Paul Schaefer took me to the Beaver House for the first time. It was November during deer hunting season. Somewhere below Eleventh Mountain in the gathering gloom of an autumn afternoon, three miles from the nearest road, lay a hunting tent populated with men who Paul had recruited into the Cataract Hunting Club five decades earlier. In fact, the original club members, including fathers and grandfathers of the current generation, dated to 1933 when Paul first hired a teamster to take them in by horse and wagon. They were still going in that way, thanks to area resident, master craftsman and machinist, jack of all trades, and local teamster Earl Allen and his two magnificent draft horses.

That year the knees of the seventy-eight-year-old preservationist and hunter no longer supported his frame on the three-mile tramp over rough terrain to reach the Cataract Club's primitive hunting tent on Deer Brook, above Diamond Brook. So, Paul did the next best thing. He sat in Beaver House before a roaring fire talking with me about the history of the region, its people, conservation history, hunting experiences, and the Siamese Ponds Wilderness that he knew so well.

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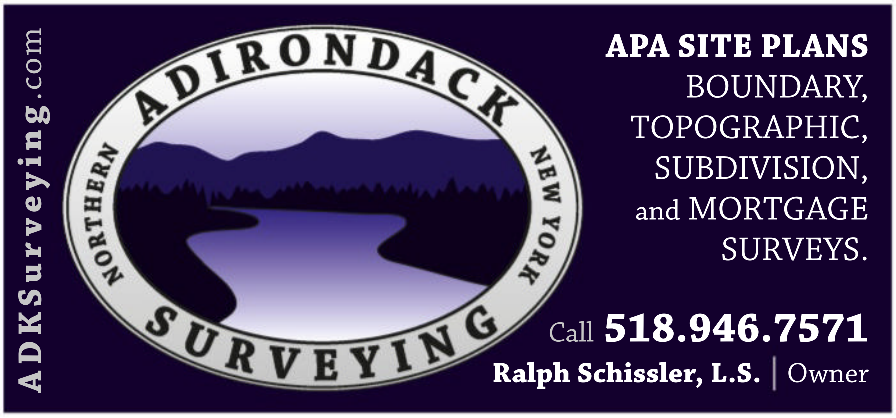
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his large, stone fireplace that fall afternoon was Schaefer's patented Adirondack cooking crane. I learned that in 1953 he had been hunting and, following a long day in the woods, he was cooking a steak over an open fire when a pot of coffee warming on the same grill spilled its contents over the steak and snuffed out the fire. Paul was disgusted by his clumsiness, but also determined to create something better. Always inventive, Paul sketched an iron cooking crane at home. Then, Paul's blacksmith created a prototype. With that in hand, Paul formed his Early American Crafts Company and its main product, the new Cooking Crane, went into production in 1956. Paul wrote to Washington DC and the Adirondack Cooking Crane received Patent 2,740,397. A number of them were installed in homes and camps Schaefer built.

As I spoke with Paul on that November afternoon, a light, cold rain began to fall on the red pines Paul, brother Carl, and their friend and local neighbor Johnny Morehouse had first planted as seedlings in 1931. Now, they were one hundred feet tall. In 1931, a young Paul Schaefer had been enthusiastic about planting five thousand spruce and red pine on that hillside. At that time, Johnny Morehouse was "incredulous." "Trees are meant to be cut, not ta plant," he told Paul. "Ye'll spile the view my father made."

Raindrops from those very trees were steadily dripping off Beaver House's roof. The afternoon's light was fading, and we were having one of our fireside conversations. I was comfortable in the firelit warmth of the camp's main room listening to Paul when, out of the blue, he said: "Now, Dave, reach into the pocket of my hunting jacket and take out the piece of paper." I gave him the paper.

"I need you to hike into the wilderness and hand over this camping permit to the boys in camp. If the Forest Ranger shows up and they don't have this permit, they could be in a lot of trouble. So, you'd do me and them a big favor by hiking in there." My heart jumped. I had never been to the camp before. "How do I reach their camp, Paul?"

Paul gestured with his big right hand, his head cocked, emphasizing.

"Go down the trail here to the junction, and then follow the wagon trail west, keeping the mountain always on your left. A mile in, you'll reach the height of land. Stop right there. A tall red spruce stands ahead on a rise. Don't go past it. Bear left, keep the mountain always to your left, and follow the stream down another mile to a beaver flow. From there, the trail bears left and uphill. You can't miss it. And tell the boys I may try to go in there tomorrow, but I'm not promising."

He gave me a rain slicker and a flashlight, and a hearty "you'll be back in no time." With the camping permit in my pocket, my heart pounding, and my voice full of false confidence, I headed out the cabin door.

The rain was falling more steadily and afternoon's light was fading as I

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tried to determine if I had reached the height of land. On the rough wagon trail, I had gone up and down. This is wrinkled Adirondack land. Height of land seemed a frustrating matter of impression in these big woods. Trying to keep the mountain in sight I thought I saw the landmark red spruce, veered left, saw the wagon wheel impressions, and trusted to luck. I suddenly realized my pant legs were soaked through. Trudging on, up and over large boulders, the trees seemed noticeably larger, including enormous red spruce, sugar maple, and yellow birch looming overhead. How could Earl Allen's work horses pull a wagon full of hunting gear all the way back here, I asked myself in wonderment.

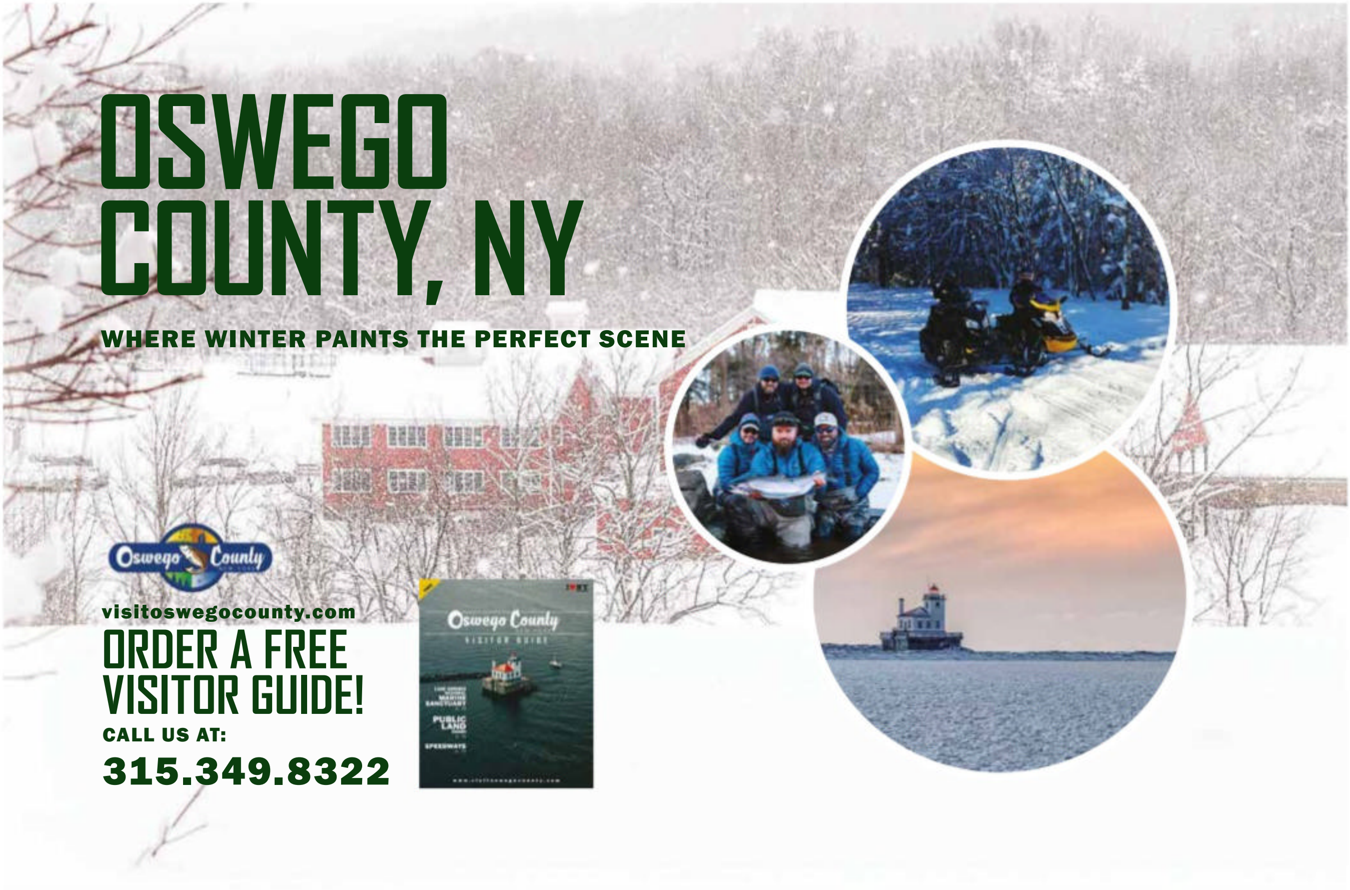
But I was on a mission for Paul. I stumbled on down the trail, stepping over huge rocks and crossing small streams. Then, my excitement grew as through the trees and the rain I finally saw the big beaver meadow Paul had mentioned to my right. I veered away from it as he had instructed and went uphill. After some more uphill clambering, I began to smell wood smoke.

Excited, I went farther into some thick balsam and red spruce, following my nose. As I pushed through a stand of balsam fir, suddenly the long tent appeared ahead of me. I couldn't believe my good fortune. I had made it. I heard muffled laughter from inside the big tent. Then my mouth dropped. In the glow of my flashlight, a large, antlered deer hung from a pole outside the tent entrance.

Taking a deep breath, I pulled the tent flaps open and stuck my head inside. I remember the hissing of those kerosene lamps. All conversation ceased, as ten hunters looked up at me from the chow they were eating at a long table. "Gosh," someone said, "you look kind of wet. What can we do you for?" "Fellas, Paul sent me in with your camping permit." At that, I triumphantly reached into my jeans and out came the piece of paper, dripping wet. For a minute nobody said a word, until one of them broke the silence. "Give this to me straight. Paul sent you in here tonight to give us that?" I nodded. The tent erupted in roars of laughter.

One of the men got up and gave me something warm to drink and a place by the stove. The good-natured kidding went on for a while. I felt a whole lot better about life and a bit dryer, and with newfound confidence eventually headed back to the cabin. I somehow made it back, soaked to the skin. The cabin lights were like a port in a storm as Paul welcomed me back with that enormous handshake of his and a plate of food. "Take a seat and tell me how the boys are doing." As I ate, I knew that I had passed some test that mattered to Paul Schaefer, the first of many to come.

**Excerpted from *A Force for Nature: Paul Schaefer's Adirondack Coalitions* by David Gibson, published by Syracuse University Press. Copyright 2025, Syracuse University Press.**



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# Mushrooms and More

## Mixing it up at Running Roots Farm

BY NIKI KOUROFSKY

Running Roots, a specialty mushroom and garlic farm on the cusp of the northeastern Blue Line, looks much like other small-scale operations: Wildflowers set against a knockout view of the Champlain Valley. A start-up-sized plot tucked into the meadowy spread, with rows of asparagus, bunch greens and squash, as well as larger carve-outs for rotating garlic crops. Nearby, a waddle of ducks gobble slugs and snails and other pests inside a patch of grass bounded by movable fencing—the biocontrol brigade. Out of sight, about a quarter-mile tromp into the 55-acre property, an old apple orchard that's been suffocated by invasive buckthorn is slowly being brought back to life.

But inside the farmhouse, down the stairs and into a tricked-out basement, the scene is less pastoral and more mad professor. Here, Lucas Michelotti, who has a background in forestry and fungal genetics, grows a variety of gourmet mushrooms.

And, yes, he does keep his fungi in the dark—or, rather, inside grow tents that Lucas regulates to control temperature, humidity and carbon-dioxide levels—but he doesn't feed them poop.

The process starts with blocks made of oat hulls and hardwood sawdust, which are sterilized, inoculated with grain spawn (grains with fungus growing in them) and incubated in cool, dark conditions for two weeks to three months. Fruiting happens when the fungus is exposed to fresh air in the grow tents.

The result is a chef's dream: earthy shiitake, meaty king trumpet, glamorous lion's mane, fruity enoki, a rainbow of oysters.

But as any mycology fan knows, the fruits of fungi are only the tippy-top of their appeal, and simply supplying pantries wasn't what drew Lucas and his partner, Amanda Meier, to this patch of the North Country.

After meeting at Muhlenberg College, in Pennsylvania, Lucas and Amanda—who has a PhD in ecology and evolutionary biology, with a keen interest in agroecology and soil health—bounced around from here to there, but one thing kept them grounded: "We've always wanted to manage land," Amanda says.

When she got a teaching position in the biological sciences department at SUNY Plattsburgh, in 2023, the couple saw their chance in a nearby spread that had been overrun with invasives. Their future plans include diversifying their crops and expanding their foraging game (Lucas is certified in wild mushroom food safety), but one of their top priorities is restoring the land—checking the spread of invasives and reseeding native plants.

**Lucas Michelotti and Amanda Meier inside their grow space.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN STECHSCHULTE

It's a lot—cultivating mushrooms, duck wrangling, reviving an orchard, eradicating invasives—and the pair admits they don't get out much.

But doing what they love in this beautiful place, where else would they want to be?

## Garlicky Pan-Fried Oyster Mushrooms

After a lot of trial and error with oyster mushrooms, a chef showed Lucas and Amanda a few tricks. This mix is delicious on its own or it can be served over pasta or in a stir-fry or omelet.

**½ pound oyster mushrooms**
**1 tablespoon lemon juice**
**1 tablespoon white wine**
**1 tablespoon olive oil**
**1 tablespoon butter**
**2–3 garlic cloves, smashed & diced**
**3 sprigs of thyme**
**Pinch of salt and pepper**

**DIRECTIONS:**

With your fingers, pull each mushroom off from the clump. Rip in half lengthwise along the gills, from cap to stem. If the mushrooms are large, continue to rip into thinner strips. If the strips are long, rip in half. Strips should be 1 to 2" wide at the cap and 1 to 3" long. (The thin pieces of stem will be very tender, so be sure to include them.)

Sauté the mushrooms on medium-low heat, covered, without oil or butter. They will begin to release moisture after several minutes. Remove the lid and allow the moisture to evaporate. (Sweating the mushrooms like this helps them absorb more flavor.)

Once the mushrooms start to stick to the pan, add lemon juice and white wine to deglaze. Raise heat to medium-high.

When most of the liquid is gone, add the olive oil, butter, diced garlic and thyme. Sauté until the mushrooms are golden brown and edges are crispy.

Add salt and pepper, to taste. Serve warm.

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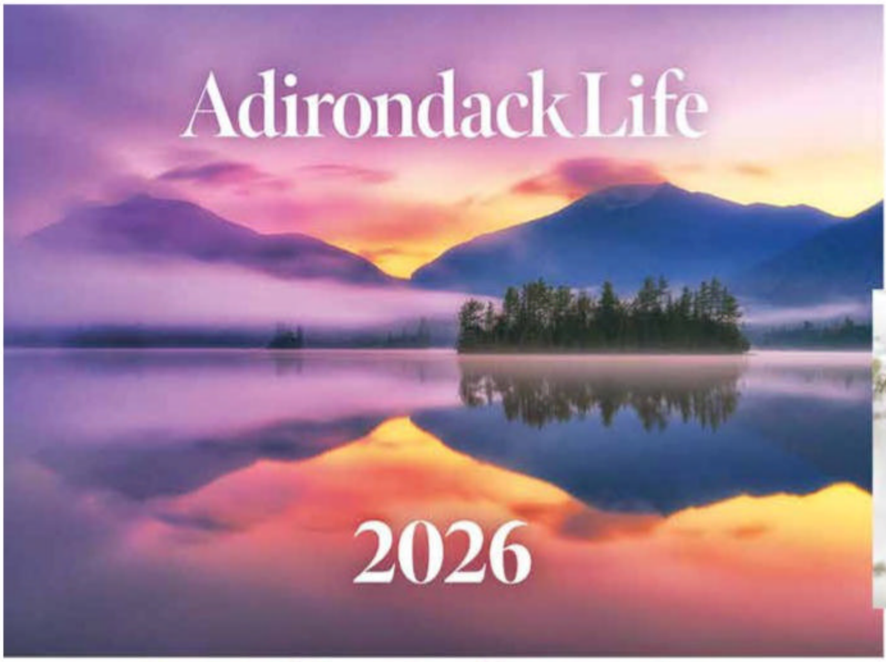

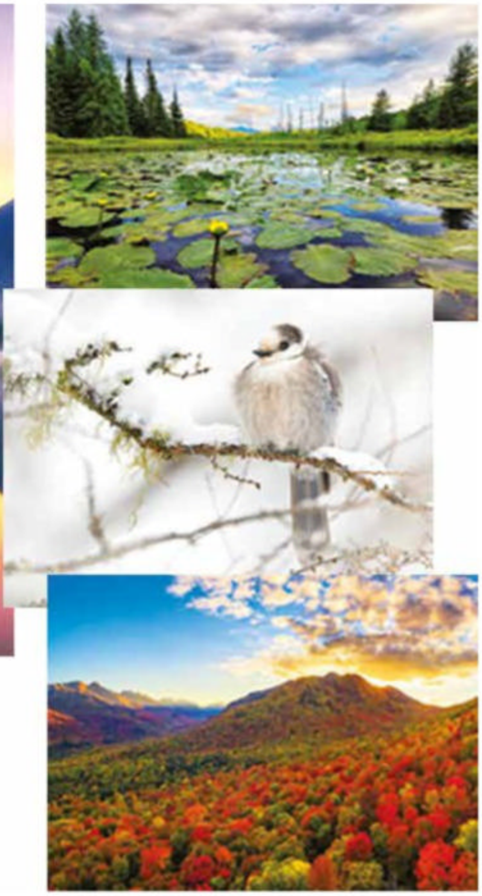

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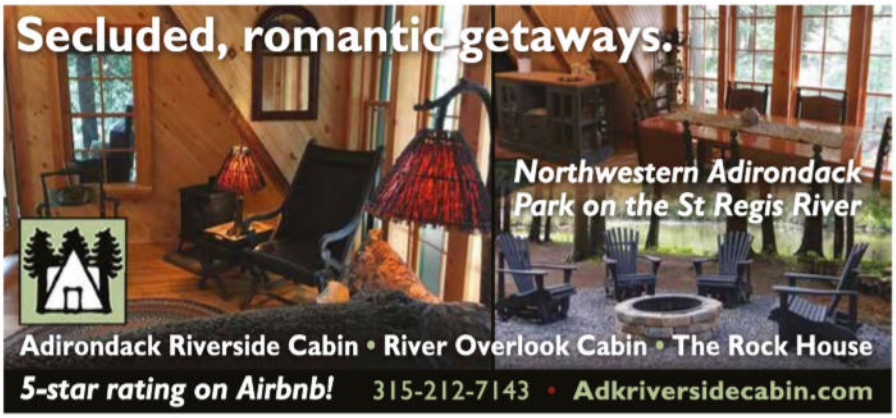

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# Lofty Spaces

## The simple, satisfying art of building tree houses

**BY DEREK "DEEK" DIEDRICKSEN**

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: **"For the Birds," held aloft by two trees, can be built in a weekend. "The Snail," made from scraps and salvaged materials, is a lightweight aerial pod.**

A tree house is an escape to nature, a haven from the elements that is made within the elements.

From their long and functional use as perches aloft, providing safety from the reach of wild animals to their use as surveillance points for hunters, birdwatchers, and young children, tree houses have been around for quite some time, and shall continue to be. Part of their appeal is what I call "the allure of the skies": "What do the birds see? What is their vantage? I want to experience it!" But beyond that, they're just outright fun in their unconventional and often primitive basis.

Their affordability, in some cases, additionally makes them attractive. Having built tree houses for as little as $200 and others almost completely free of cost with the use of found and salvaged materials, I can attest to this. After all, what better and more cost-effective way is there to build a stilted structure than to use stilts that are readily available and plentiful—trees. They are almost everywhere, most of them are incredibly strong, and they're gorgeous.

Indeed, you could go outside right now and simply put a plank or platform in the boughs of an oak and create a quiet place to read, relax, nap, or observe. That affordable accessibility is most certainly one large factor that keeps these structures in our minds. Forget crushing mortgages or loans and dismiss the idea of needing a giant team of high-priced contractors and carpenters. You could go out and build a tree house today. And I hope you do.

### For the Birds

**Size: 32 square feet**

This simple and affordable tree house could be built in a weekend. Its huge triangular floor was built in halves so as to enable easy transport down an incredi-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEREK DIEDRICKSEN

bly steep hill. These were placed on two girders that were installed on site.

If you look closely, you'll see that every pound of this structure is held aloft by two trees; there isn't a single pole aiding the structure. The majority of support for this build comes from the diagonal bracing with 2×8s from underneath, and the girder cradles on the tree carry the rest of the weight.

Because it is a tree house at a summer-only residence, we didn't want access to it to be too easy or enticing (to avoid kids getting hurt and vandalism), so a portable ladder is brought to the little hut in season.

This tree house is partially enclosed. Built roughly 10 feet off the ground, the shelter affords a view above the tall grass of the marsh onto a very private cove with an abundance of wildlife. As it turns out, this spot happens to be the fishing grounds of a great blue heron, which we've observed feeding several times. By being above the bird's line of sight—not to mention those of other creatures—this little build is great for quiet observation. The view was so spectacular that I didn't even want glass or Plexiglas getting in the way, never mind 2×4 framing to support and affix such items. The result is something somewhat resembling a small scout camp lean-to, but aloft.

A drop-down screen to protect against insects may be a good idea for an open build like this, though mosquitoes don't really seem to enter this space. (Fun fact: Mosquitoes generally don't fly at heights greater than 25 feet—one argument, perhaps, for building very high up in a tree.)

Finally, I left as many branches as possible, as I do often with my tree house builds, so that the structure feels naturally enveloped or "hugged" by the trees. The pine boughs that drape in front of the build provide shade for the house's inhabitants and make them virtually invisible to the birds, as well as to the occasional motorboat or kayak that passes through the area.

**Safety Notes**

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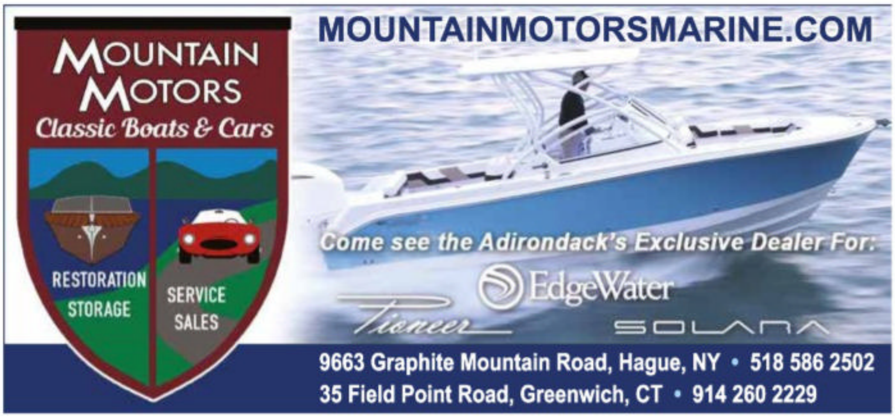
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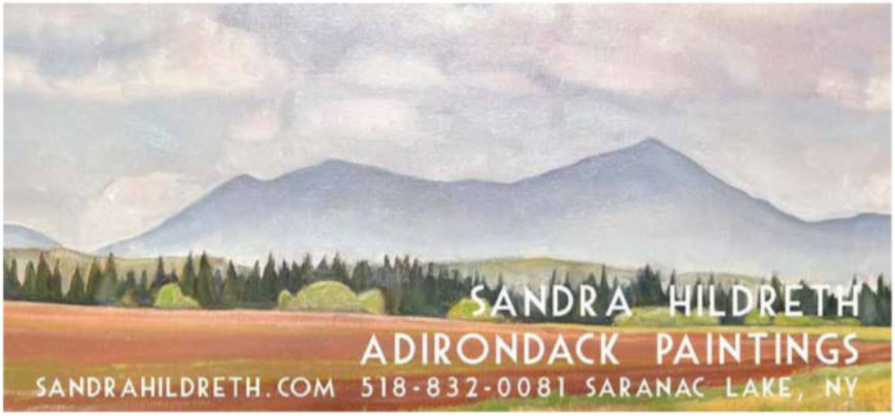
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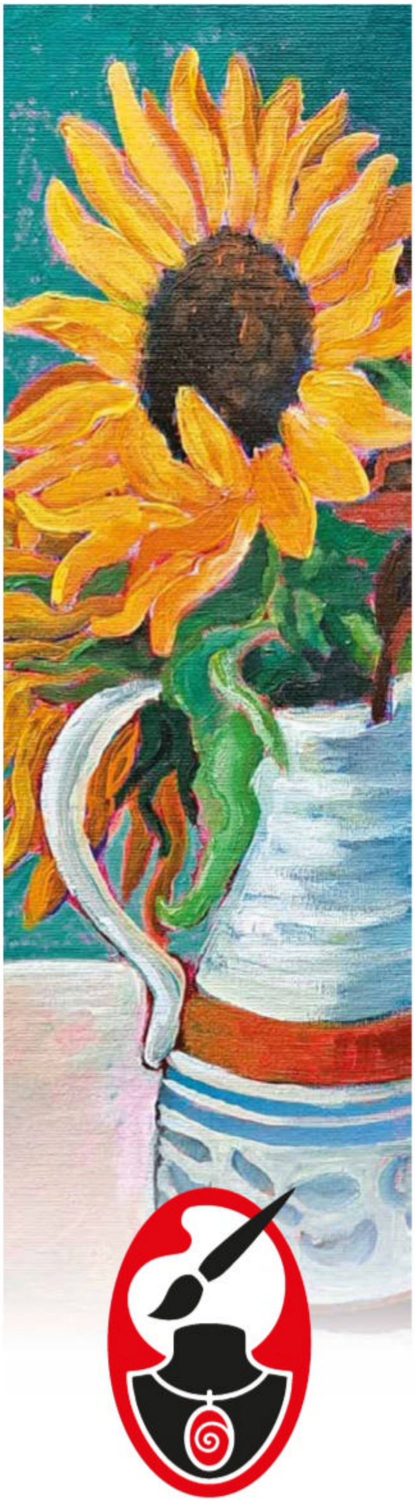

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ment bolts) hardware would have immediately doubled my almost nonexistent budget, I used lag screws (large, heavy-duty screws with hex heads) on this one. They have been in place for years without problems, though I do have to back them out a halfturn or so every year as the tree widens when it grows. Modern hardware is the way to go, but this old method still works with smaller builds and the right setup (with the caveat of needing some attention and maintenance in the years down the road).

Always avoid building too close to the water because of the issue of soil saturation (tree roots are less stable). This tree house was a good 10-plus feet away from the water's edge.

**The Snail**
**Size: 38 square feet**
This little guy is so tiny that it really only sleeps one average-to-large adult—and only if that adult sleeps diagonally. It will fit two sleepers that are shorter in stature (say, 5 foot 8 and under). This size was intentional, as we were experimenting with constructing mini homeless shelters that could be built for almost nothing with the intention of keeping people out of the elements, even just temporarily. It was also an example of "build with what ya got," and we just didn't have many longer boards. By being so very tiny, it is also easy to hide or camouflage.

This aerial pod was cobbled together from free scraps and salvaged and roadside materials, though we did use new Suntuf panels and a few pressure treated 2×8s. It was intentionally designed to be very lightweight, since it was built in panels that had to be carried a quarter of a mile into the woods across very uneven terrain. A good deal of the framing was made with 2×2s and it was clad in low-density Northern White Cedar. Because of this, the whole tree house was so light that when preassembled and tested, it could be lifted off the ground by just two people. This "daintiness" enabled its thinner cradle members and diagonal bracing to suffice, and it has sat in the same spot, unaltered and untroubled, for almost nine years now.

The ladder, too, was built from lumber we already had on hand. The angular cuts to each step end were made for aesthetics and to give the tree house and its ladder an almost UFO look. Many say that "the UFO" would have been a better name for this one.

The tar-paper roof was an unintended experiment, but it held up surprisingly well for over six years, so when it was time for a replacement, we just stapled another fresh layer or two of tar paper over it, allowing for some overhang. A roof like this is ugly, yes, but it's so high up that only the birds will really see it.

**Safety Notes**

I've used this tree house as a sort of an experiment and would not recommend this approach. It is held up by lag screws, and while I'd normally back them out a half-turn or so every year to allow for tree growth and movement, I have chosen not to, keeping tabs on what happens. The tree is slowly engulfing the board and growing around it, so that the board is now almost inset on a bulged ledge of the tree as the widening trunk has expanded beneath it. If anything, this seems to give the supports additional bolstering. It is doing so on one small area of each supportive tree, so I don't feel it will do much damage to the trees over time.

The TimberLOK screws (heavy-duty wood screws) have not given way or snapped, nor have their flange heads been sucked into the board. I'm also keeping an eye on the bark near the junction to make sure I'm not promoting trapped water or rot.

Laying wood batten strips near the outward edges of the tar-paper roof is also a great idea to keep the ends from coming loose in high winds, which would ultimately lead to the roof's demise.

**Excerpted from *Tree Houses Within Reach: 30 Lofty Cabins, Playhouses, and Getaways You Can Actually Build* (2025) by Derek "Deek" Diedricksen—author of *Micro Living and Microshelters*—used with permission from Storey Publishing (413-346-2100).**

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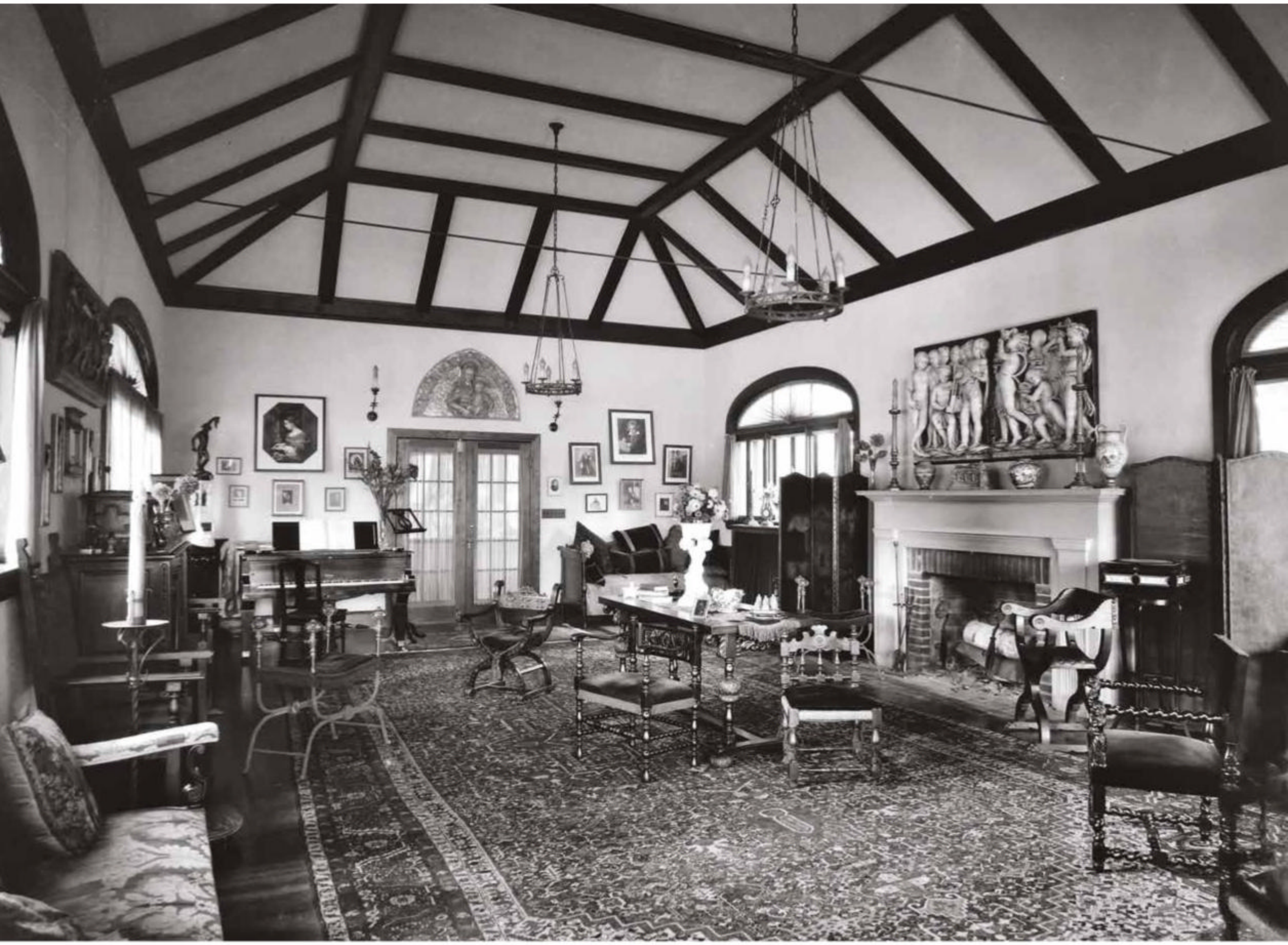

As fans of HBO's *The Gilded Age* will know, Polish-born soprano Marcella Sembrich was a buzz-worthy addition to the The Metropolitan Opera's premier season, in 1883. By the time the international superstar retired from the operatic stage, in 1909, she had wowed audiences there more than 450 times. Sembrich moved on to a successful career as a concert singer, then turned her attention to teaching.

She built her Bolton Landing studio on Lake George in 1922, hosting promising students there every summer from 1925 to 1934. A 1927 *New York Times* article described the scene: "In the studio, which holds about 100 persons, also take place the afternoon pupils' concerts. … These receptions are full of color with an appeal to the eye as well as to the ear."

The lakeside studio, now a museum and performance space that draws top-of-their-fields talent, still hums with color and music each summer. The Sembrich (518-644-2431, www.thesembrich.org) closes for the season on October 13.

***The Sembrich Studio (View from the Southwest Entrance)*** **Fred Thatcher (1881–1969) 1951.**
**Photograph from The Sembrich Collection, Bolton Landing, NY**

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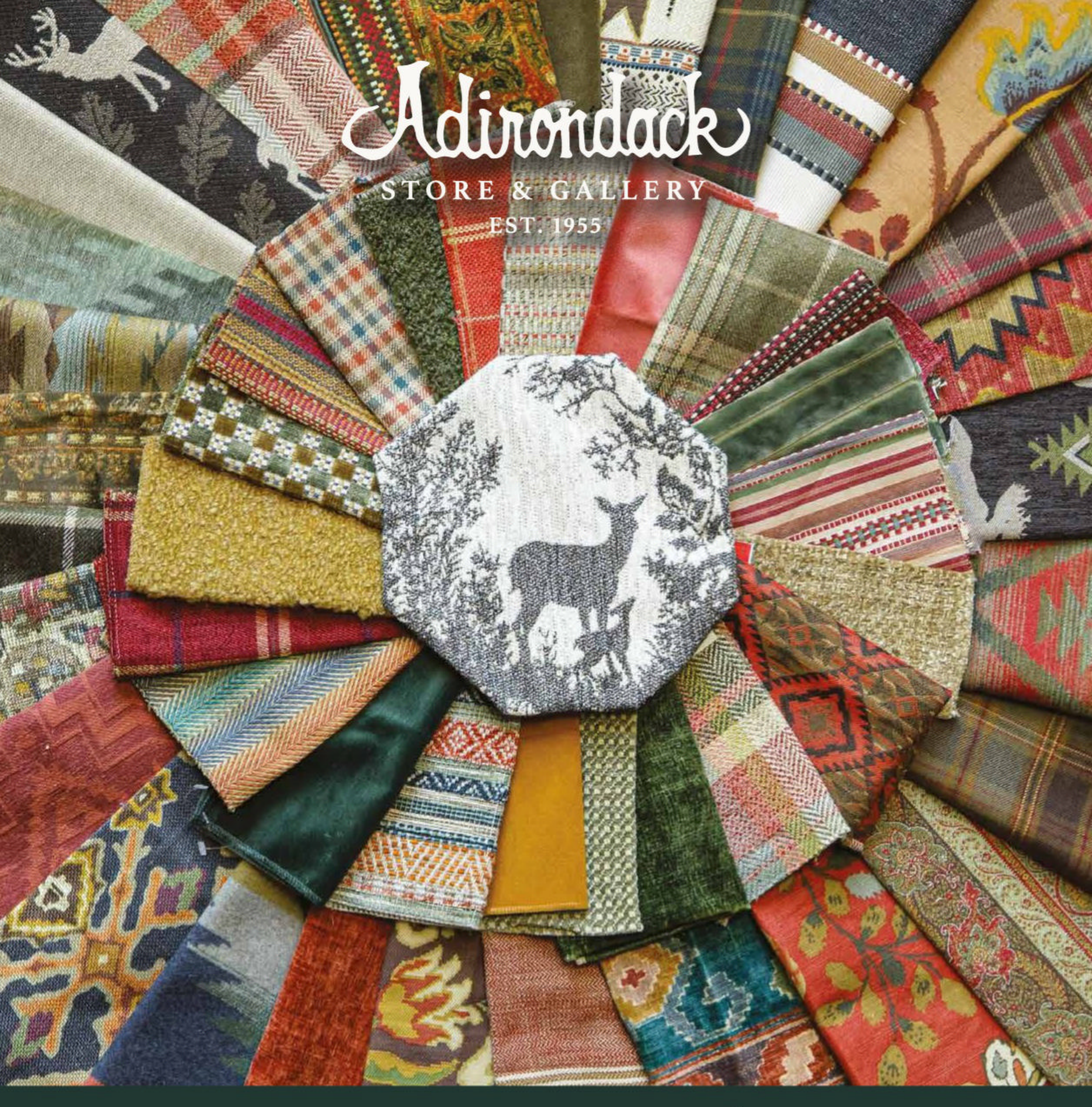

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